



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

D

O

ON

W

2





600073077U





600073077U





BURIED FOR GOLD.

A NOVEL.

BY

A. C. SAMPSON,

AUTHOR OF 'THE SCARBOROUGH BELLE,' 'CRUSHED BENEATH HIS IDOL,'
'SPOILED BY A WOMAN,' ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



TINSLEY BROTHERS,
CATHERINE STREET, STRAND,
LONDON.

1882.

[All Rights reserved.]

251. k. 144.

COLSTON AND SON, PRINTERS, EDINBURGH.



CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
BURIED FOR GOLD,	I

CHAPTER II.

A HUMAN THORN,	58
--------------------------	----

CHAPTER III.

. A CITY WAIF,	100
--------------------------	-----

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM,	131
----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER V.

FLORIAN'S FATE,	161
---------------------------	-----

COLSTON AND SON, PRINTERS, EDINBURGH.



D.

1. The

2. The

3. The

4. The

5. The

6. The

me's,

the

er at

has a

gain.'

tions,

A





600073077U





600073077U





600073077U



this interim, by dint of a little tact and foresight in speculation, I believe I shall be able to realise sufficient money to set us both afloat, independent of fraud, mind you. I say without robbing her. I have indeed sufficient faith in my capacity for such matters to imagine that, when Tara once more is enabled to become her own mistress, and we come to square accounts together, I shall not show a faulty balance. *Money makes money*, you know, with capital at hand. A judicious speculator can amass a fortune in no time.'

'And as readily lose one,' ejaculated Forbes. 'I wish to heaven, Orme, you wouldn't go on steeping this transaction in the rose-hued light of in-

nocence, for it's a d—d peace of treachery from beginning to end. And I'll say it to your face ; though I may soil my own hands through meddling in it.'

'Listen,' urged Orme persuasively, laying his hand on his companion's arm ; 'I know for a fact that Tara has a sum of eighty thousand pounds lying at her bankers ; twenty thousand pounds of this shall be yours, down on the nail, the moment I am in a position to act as her representative. This I will secure to you, and render you independent. And with respect to replacing this sum, in event of investigation, I will trust to my own ingenuity. All I ask of you is, to obtain me the certificate.'

‘You tempt me, as the devil himself might. I wish I’d never seen your face!’ exclaimed the young doctor hotly, as he flung off the detaining hand and rose to pace the room with down-cast head and moody brow. ‘Money’s the devil’s own leading-strings; it’s a curse. There is nothing like the want of it to draw a man on to become the tool of another’s evil machinations.’

‘Come, I hope you won’t cut up rusty, now that I’ve shown my hand,’ remarked Orme, losing temper.

‘I saw your cards all through,’ was the surly rejoinder.

‘Well, well, what matter? I don’t think you’re the man to abuse another’s confidence.’

Forbes vouchsafed no reply; but taking his seat at the table again, sat there moodily, balancing his knife on his finger.

‘I do not wish you to give me a decided answer now; think well over what I have said, and then act as you think best,’ remarked Orme, breaking the silence.

‘I never come to any decision without reflection,’ said Forbes briefly.

‘No; well then, you are right. I need only say, if you come to the conclusion of helping me in this course, the matter of carrying it out will rest in your hands solely.’

‘That’s impossible. I should, in event of taking this upon me, have to find

another medical man to see the girl. It requires two signatures for a certificate.

‘*Really?* How unfortunate. That does place a terrible barrier in the way.’

‘One which *I* might surmount, nevertheless, for I know a young fellow who is studying to become qualified to attend the insane. I did him a service once, and he has great faith in me. I think I could influence him sufficiently to sign.’

‘I am sure you could; you’re a clever fellow, Forbes, and can do anything you set your heart to do.’

‘But I haven’t promised to do anything, recollect *that*.’

‘Well, we won’t squabble over what may or may not be your intention.

You can retract; of course, only hold with me for the time being, just to prove if my scheme is feasible. Now, just for mere hypothesis, let us take it for granted that a proper certificate has been obtained. Where, as the next step, should we find an asylum?’

‘Oh, that would be easy enough, provided a handsome yearly sum should be paid.’

‘But do you know of one in particular?’

‘Yes; it is a good many miles away. I am acquainted with the proprietor; he’s as great an old hypocrite as ever lived, and would sell his soul a dozen times over for gold. Nevertheless, I believe his patients fare as well

with him as they are ever likely to do in such places.'

'Will you give me his address?' asked Orme anxiously.

'Oh, there will be time enough for that by-and-by—you have to get the certificate first.'

'But he may not have room for an additional patient.'

'No fear! He'll *make room* for a *rich* one. However, I'll drive over and see him to-morrow, perhaps, and then I can give you more particulars, and about your friend the—'

'Will you speak to him?'

'Well, I cannot give you any promise; I'll see about it; but if I do, we must each make a separate examina-

tion of Miss Trevor before we sign the certificate.'

'Indeed! Well, *you know* best. But, in any case, you will see Tara again; she certainly requires medical attendance.'

'I did say to her that I should call in the day after to-morrow, and I most likely shall. Probably I shall be able then to speak to you more definitely about the subject we have been discussing. I must run away now, however, to see some old friends at Cheltenham.'

.

The morning appointed by Forbes for his visit broke bright and smiling over Tara's home, to belie, as it were, the dark clouds looming and threatening the horizon of her fate. And as Orme came

into the drawing-room about noon, the sunshine falling on Tara's pallid face and sunken eyes, as she reclined listlessly on the sofa there, showed him the ravages illness had made.

'No better, Tara?' he asked, with tender concern in his voice, as he took her burning hand.

'No, I'm no better,' she answered sadly; 'I have such terrible pain and weight in my head, and no appetite. Then the sleep I get seems more like stupor, except for the frightful dreams which come at times. I can't think what ails me. I've grown so weak and nervous that I could just sit down and cry the whole day long. It was very kind in you to send Dr Forbes to see me, but he did

not prescribe anything; I wish he had, for, do you know, these strange feelings frighten me.'

'Well, candidly speaking, Forbes was a little puzzled by your case, and I fancy he objects to act on his own responsibility. He bid me ask you if he might send a doctor—a very clever fellow, and friend of his—to see you; shall he?'

'If you think it advisable. I'd see any one whom I thought could do me good.'

'All right, then, I'll let Forbes know. And one thing, Tara, I must beg of you—that is, to be very explicit with the doctors; tell them everything, and about that strange vision. If you keep them in the dark, they cannot judge fairly of your case.'

‘Yes, I will do so,’ she answered wearily, as if only anxious to get rid of the subject, while unnatural languor seemed creeping upon her, even while she spoke. ‘Do you know,’ she said, making an effort to rouse herself, ‘I *do* feel so ill that I dread to leave home.’

‘But you *must*,’ interposed Orme, sharply and decisively; ‘you’ll *die* if you remain.’

‘I don’t fancy sometimes that I shall benefit by going away,’ she continued; ‘my mind will be uneasy about the house. It would be different if Mrs Bradley was a person I *could* trust.’

‘But you have promised to trust *me*. And, indeed, I will try to carry out all your views and wishes in your absence

to the best of my ability. And yet,' he added spontaneously, as if struck by sudden thought, 'I might experience a difficulty in acting as agent for you without some given form of authority from yourself. Suppose, now, you were to write a letter to your solicitor, requesting him to let me represent you until your return. Something after this style,' he added, as going over to the writing-table he took out materials and wrote:—

‘DEAR MR —,—I am obliged through ill-health to leave the Grange. Until such time as I may be able to return, please consider my cousin, Treilhard Orme, as representing me, and act as he may, instruct you. I have given him full power

to manage my affairs during my absence.

—Yours truly, TARA TREVOR.'

‘Do you think that will do?’ he asked, handing her the written sheet.

‘Yes,’ answered the girl rather absently, as if unconsciously yielding to the influence which this man exercised over her in her weak state of health.

‘You had better copy it at once,’ he went on, ‘and, although it need not be posted till you wish, still having the letter in readiness will be a step taken towards putting things in order. I had a villainous pen; this looks a better,’ he said, smiling pleasantly as he offered one to Tara, who, in obedience to his wish, had seated herself before her desk.

‘I wish I knew the people better to whom I am going,’ remarked Tara, handing him the letter she had finished, which he first read, and then carelessly thrust into his pocket.

‘You will be charmed with them when you do,’ he said, in answer to her remark. ‘They will take care of you, and show you every kindness.’

‘How soon then do you think I had better go?’

‘Oh, that will depend on the opinion of Dr Forbes and the other physician; if they think you well enough, the sooner you start the better. I have some business letters to write, so you must excuse me now, Tara, but I will be here early to-morrow in order to meet Forbes.’

.

Orme kept his word, and very soon after breakfast made his appearance at the Grange, where, shut up alone in the library, he waited in a state of the greatest trepidation the advent of coming events. It was a relief to his anxious mind, therefore, when, about two o'clock, ushered in by the maid, Quintin Forbes appeared.

‘This is Dr Davis, my friend of whom you have heard me speak,’ he said, turning to introduce a young man who followed close on his heels. ‘I thought it best for him to come with me,’ continued Forbes—Orme having bowed and shaken hands. ‘We can examine Miss Trevor *separately*, nevertheless.’

‘I was sorry to hear from Dr Forbes that your cousin is suffering from a bad form of melancholia and mental derangement,’ said Dr Davis, feeling bound to make some comment.

‘I grieve to say such is the case,’ returned Orme, with solemn sadness of tone. ‘I will ring for the person who has been most with my unfortunate cousin; she will be able to detail to you the symptoms of her disease better than I could. — Tell Mrs Bradley to come here,’ he added, addressing the servant who answered the bell.

Mrs Bradley answered the summons promptly; she came in softly, her face elongated lugubriously, and her reddish eyes wet with crocodile tears.

‘This is the housekeeper,’ said Orme by way of introduction, looking towards the stranger as she entered; ‘she can give you every information, Dr Davis, for she has been a companion to Miss Trevor ever since she came to the Grange. Have you not, Mrs Bradley?’

‘Yes,’ she answered, wiping away the traces of her emotion. ‘I’ve been housekeeper to the late Squire for the last fourteen years, and always met with the greatest kindness from him and from Miss Trevor also. When she came first she was a charming young lady—goodness itself to every one; but since her grandfather’s death she has altered entirely. I think the shock of losing him so suddenly has affected her brain,

so that at times she is quite uncontrollable ; indeed, for my own part, I go in fear of my life through her. Not very long ago she threatened me with a knife, and declared she would kill me at some time if not then, and she tore and danced about in her fury, and pulled her hair out in handfuls, yelling at me all the while till I got out of her reach, and made for the stairs. She pushed me down, so that I fell, and was so injured that I just managed to get on my hands and knees into the dining-room, before fear brought on a violent fit of hysterics. The servants in the house can vouch for what I say. Besides, she terrifies us by wandering about the house at night carrying pieces of lighted rag or paper, to keep off the

ghosts as she says. And she will end by burning the place down, I *do* believe. Some nights she steals away out of the house altogether, and none of us dare stop her; and goes away bareheaded to the churchyard, where she says she meets her grandfather's spirit and talks to it.'

'There, Mrs Bradley, that will do,' interposed Orme. 'I know you have only related one or two of the many acts — eccentricity — committed by my poor afflicted cousin; but we must not tax the patience of the doctors further.'

'Before you go, your own opinion is that Miss Trevor is insane, is it not?' asked Forbes.

'I've *not a doubt of it*; and my heart is broken through it; for I fear

I shall lose the dearest, best, and gentlest mistress in the world,—so young and sweet and pretty too. Oh dear! it is so sad—so very sad, sir;’ and once more giving vent to her feelings, apparently, and burying her face in her hands, this feminine fiend having acted her part to perfection, hurried from the room.

Forbes was first to break the silence when the men were left to themselves.

‘I think,’ he said, ‘in Miss Trevor’s weak state, it will be best for me to go in first and see her. I can then prepare her for Davis’ visit. It will make no difference, you see, so long as we hold an interview separately.’

‘Arrange it as you think best, gentlemen,’ said Orme, formally ringing the

bell as he spoke, and desiring the maid who answered it to conduct Dr Forbes to Miss Trevor.

Tara rose as he entered, looking pale and haggard, with dark circles beneath her eyes, which told of sleepless nights.

‘I fear your nights are restless,’ he said, after feeling her pulse.

‘My eyes seem strained, as if they could not close,’ she said, turning wearily towards him. ‘Besides, I hear such noises and see such sights in the house, that I dread the night. I am very unwell, doctor; what *can* be the matter? All the pain is here,’ she added, laying her hand on her forehead.

‘Yes; well, now, show me your tongue. Ah! you are feverish and out of sorts.

Now, I've brought a little sedative with me ; put out your tongue once more, please ; there, you'll feel easier after that,' he remarked, after having laid a tiny amount of powder out of a packet on her tongue. 'And now I must leave you,' he added shortly. 'I have brought my friend, Dr Davis, to see you. You must be very frank and open with him, mind. Tell him about these visions which torment you, and everything else.'

Something in this man's manner struck a deadly fear to the core of the poor girl's heart.

'What did it all mean ?' she asked herself. 'Assuredly there was something seriously the matter with her, else why

did he stare at her in that earnest way ?

• Was *she dying* ?'

Busy with these thoughts, she hardly noted his departure ; but once alone, her brain seemed to grow dizzy. And as she pressed her hands against her throbbing temples to ease the pain, Dr Davis entered.

The unfortunate Tara tried to regain her usual composure of manner to greet this stranger, but vainly ; her eyes grew dim and restless, and a vacancy seemed to benumb her senses, as the young man seated himself before her, and began to elicit from her the nature of her malady by every possible inquiry.

Tara answered him mechanically, like one talking in her sleep, till he alluded

to the vision. Then she rose, shuddering from head to foot.

‘*Don’t,*’ she cried; ‘don’t talk of it. I cannot bear more at present.’

She looked wild as she faced him, in her terror and excitement, like some poor hunted-down animal brought to bay, and Dr Davis, fearing that one of the paroxysms of the disease was at hand, cautiously and with alacrity took his leave.

‘I hardly have ever met with a similar case,’ he said, on joining Orme and Forbes in the library. ‘If Miss Trevor was addicted to the use of stimulants, I should say she had been indulging, from her appearance; but that is out of the question. In her present state she certainly requires control and supervision, I should say.’

‘You would be more convinced of it if you were a witness to some of her frantic outbursts ; but there is so much cunning in madness. She has talked perfectly rationally one hour, and the next been raving and the terror of the household. It is very sad, is it not ?’ asked Orme lachrymosely, as he concluded his speech.

‘*Very,*’ returned Dr Davis heartily ; ‘a sadder case there could not be ; so very lovely as she is, and young, to be thus afflicted.’

‘About the certificate?’ asked Forbes in his harsh, jerky way—terminating this flow of eloquence.

‘Well,’ answered his friend, ‘of course, throughout, I have been greatly guided

by what you have told me, and this interview with Miss Trevor has not entitled me to take a different view. You had better come to my house, Forbes, and dine with me, and then we can make out the certificate, and sign it together.'

'I shall hear from you, I suppose,' said Orme, as he shook hands with both men and saw them to the door.

'Oh yes, I'll see or write to you,' replied Forbes, as he turned down the avenue with his companion.

Orme remained standing on the steps, looking after their retreating figures till suddenly, as if awakened to some thought, he gave a shrill whistle. Both men turned.

‘Forbes,’ he cried, walking hurriedly towards them, ‘I wish to speak to *you* *one* minute. I want to ask you about the asylum,’ he said, as Forbes, having left Dr Davis to proceed, came up. ‘Did you go there?’

‘Yes; and saw the proprietor. Of course this is a special case; you must make it worth his while to retain the patient.’

‘My dear fellow,’ returned Orme, laying his hand on his friend’s shoulder, ‘I wish to be guided by you with regard to the required allowance. I look to you to arrange all these preliminaries; in fact, as I have said, I leave all in your hands.’

‘Five hundred or six hundred pounds

per annum would not be any too much to offer, or even seven,' answered Forbes shortly, shaking off with a slight shrug the touch of those fingers which instinctively he felt were dragging him down to the depths of moral degradation.

'Let it be eight, if you think it best, returned Orme lightly, with the air of a man who has unburdened his mind of a heavy weight. 'And look here, Forbes,' he added, 'will you kindly see the proprietor again, and as soon as you can? Fix a day for Tara's removal. I will bring her myself, but you must prepare him, so that he may be ready to receive.'

'Oh yes, I'll see to that,' said Forbes,

as with a farewell nod he hurried on to overtake his brother practitioner.

.

Whatever might be said in favour of Dr Seymour's asylum, one thing was certainly against it, and that happened to be the situation; a more gloomy or dismal one could not well be found. The house stood in a hollow, screened by bare hills, and secluded from the inquisitive gaze of sojourners along the highway by an extensive wood, through which the approach led to the jail-like gates which secured from intruders this wretched, isolated dwelling or living tomb, and through these gates, on a certain afternoon, passed the ill-fated Tara and Treilhard Orme. There had been a

heavy rain in the morning, and as they drove up the damp, cheerless avenue the girl's heart failed her.

'Treilhard,' she whispered, plucking nervously at his sleeve, 'I *don't* like the neighbourhood ; it's horribly dull. *Do*, please, make some excuse for me and let me go back to the Grange. I shall die if I stay here.'

'What, *now!*' exclaimed Orme; '*impossible*, Tara. This is the first time I have ever known you to speak unreasonably and like a child. These friends have prepared to receive you. Your turning back now would be a downright insult. Had I been aware it was a characteristic of yours to throw people's kindness back in their teeth, I would not have

brought about this acquaintanceship, you may be sure.'

'Why, Treilhard, I wouldn't do that for the world,' said Tara earnestly; 'I'm sorry to appear so ungrateful and dissatisfied; but then you must pardon me; remember I'm ill, and unlike myself. My state of health makes me nervous.'

'Well, of course, I know; that is why I selected this place for you. The gentleman is himself a medical man, and will set you to rights in a very short time, if you will but trust yourself in his hands.'

'He might do wonders for me in a week, and that's as long, I'm sure, as I *can* stay,' said Tara, surveying the bleak scene with a shudder.

‘Little could be done in so short a time. However, don’t decide till you have given these friends a trial; when you have done so, I think you’ll remain. Come, try not to look so much like a prisoner being dragged to the Bastile.’

The poor victim smiled a wintry smile and relapsed into silence, until the carriage stopped before an irregular mass of buildings.

‘What a great rambling place it looks,’ remarked Tara.

‘It was my friend’s fancy to have it built so,’ answered Orme. ‘He is a man of means, and can humour his whims,’ he added, as he alighted and gave the bell a sharp tug.

In almost immediate response to the

summons, the ponderous hall-door swung apart, revealing a man-servant clad in the soberest of dark liveries.

‘Come this way, please, sir ; master expects you,’ he said, having received Orme’s card and examined it.

Thus invited, Orme, followed by Tara, entered the gloomy hall and ascended the wide staircase.

On the first landing their conductor paused and pressed his hand on a spring in a panel, fashioned to represent a door, which at his touch instantly slid back, showing the interior of a large and lofty apartment, into which they were ushered.

As the panel again closed noiselessly, Tara sank on a couch wearily, and look-

ing round the room, was at once struck by the formality of its appearance and its resemblance to a first-class waiting-room at a railway station. Its only adornment consisted of huge mirrors set into the walls, against which, she noticed with surprise, the couches covered with green velvet were fastened, and likewise the table in the centre of the room was secured to the floor—not a single book or ornament of any shape lay on its well-polished mahogany surface, neither did vase or statuette furnish the marble mantelpiece. In a word, there was not one article within these cold, unhome-like precincts which could possibly be raised and used as a missile.

With a shrinking sense of dread the

girl turned to her cousin, who seemed lost in thought.

‘Treilhard,’ she whispered, touching his arm to recall his attention, ‘I should be sorry to offend your friends, but I could not stay here; *indeed*, believe me, I *could* not. I think, perhaps, it would be best for me to go abroad for a few months, as you first suggested.’ You can make some excuse for me. Say I am too ill to remain in England. *Do*, please.’

‘My dear Tara, I wish you would not worry yourself in this absurd fashion,’ was the testy rejoinder; ‘your new acquaintance will be able to form his own opinion as to what means will really tend most to restore your health—you see he is a physician of great skill. I think I forgot

to mention this. Ah, here comes my friend to speak for himself,' he added, rising as the panel once more slipped stealthily back to admit the individual in question.

'This is Miss Trevor, Dr Seymour; the young lady whom you have been expecting. I am very glad she will have the benefit of your advice, for her head has been filled with sick fancies, and she has been ailing for some time.'

'I am very pleased to see Miss Trevor,' said the newcomer blandly, as, after shaking hands with Orme, he bowed to Tara, and then went over to seat himself beside her.

He appeared a man about fifty-five years of age, stoutly built, with broad shoulders and a powerful frame. His

face was full and round, with a pasty complexion, and from a grizzled fringe of dark brown hair, well oiled and curly, his massive bald head rose smooth and sallow, like a spherical globe of tallow. The best feature in his face was the nose, a very fairly fashioned organ of the Roman type, in spite of the rosy hue which dyed its tip; and the most repulsive, the mouth, with its coarse, blueish tinged lips, constantly parting over the still sound white teeth, in an unctuous smile, which screwed up the features till the small, black, twinkling, bead-like eyes were almost lost sight of in layers of fat.

‘I am sorry you have been ill,’ he said, with a furtive glance at Orme; ‘however, we will dismiss the ailments

for the present. I can only hope that this change will do you good; after luncheon we can have a little consultation, if you wish; but I must see you eat something, first; after so long a drive you must feel both fatigued and hungry; I will now ring for the servant to show you your room.'

'Thank you,' said Tara, in a bewildered way, looking appealingly at Orme in hopes that he would make some mention of her intended departure. 'You are not going away, are you?' she asked him in dismay, as she saw him commence to draw on his gloves.

'Not yet,' he answered carelessly.

'No, of course not,' interposed Dr Seymour vivaciously; 'he will stay and

take luncheon with me,' he added, at the same moment pressing with his finger a small knob on the wall, which, yielding to his touch, caused simultaneously almost a door at the other end of the room to open, through which entered a tall, masculine-looking woman about forty, with a most sinister, forbidding cast of countenance.

'Mrs Stubbs,' said Dr Seymour, addressing her, 'be good enough to show Miss Trevor to her room—you know—No. 36.'

'Yes, sir; this way, miss,' she added, motioning to Tara, and keeping her eyes sullenly fixed on the ground all the time.

The poor girl obeyed, moving like one in a dream.

'What horrible-looking people I have

got among,' she mentally soliloquised, as she passed with her conductress out of the room, and followed her up a narrow staircase; 'if Treilhard is angry, I cannot help it. I shall tell him at luncheon that I have determined to quit this place to-day.'

Alas! poor unconscious victim, she little knew how days should number years, ere her feet were free to tread the path of liberty again. No! for on she walks blindly along the narrow passage leading to her living grave. The skylight overhead gives but a dim light, nevertheless she sees plainly No. 36 in black letters painted over a door. Mrs Stubbs makes no remark, but silently draws a key from her pocket, and thrusts

it into the lock, while Tara stands motionless, regarding her with a blank look of amazement.

‘We fasten the doors when the rooms are empty,’ she says at last, observing her surprise, and then, withdrawing the key, she steps aside to let her companion pass through.

Tara hesitated a moment irresolute. Could she, standing there in the flower of her youth and loveliness, have seen the abyss into which she was about to plunge—could prevision have opened to her gaze the long vista of dreary years, which should eat away her beauty as a canker worm, and wither the freshness of her heart—could she have felt the bonds ready to bind her to this death in life—

heard the cries and prayers she should vainly utter in a horrible captivity, and felt the tears which were to hollow and waste her cheek and rob it of its bloom—could prescience have told her that when she met the outer world again it would be with streaks of silver in her golden hair, and the feebleness of age in her gait, — what an *awful* moment that would have proved.

But no—her reluctance was due to none of these visions. Futurity's inscrutable veil was closely drawn. Looking up, she only saw the cold, grey eyes of Mrs Stubbs fixed upon her. The woman's stare seemed to recall her, and, as if ashamed of having displayed such repugnance, she hastily stepped across the

threshold, to find herself in a sitting-room and bedroom communicating, and in which her attention was riveted by perceiving the same fixture of furniture to the ground which she had observed in the drawing-room.

‘What *can* it all mean?’ she asked herself. But at this juncture reflection was cut short by the succession of smothered shrieks, followed by peals of unearthly laughter.

‘*What’s that?*’ she asked, clutching at Mrs Stubbs’ dress in a paroxysm of fear.

‘Oh, nothing, miss; it’s only a lady staying here. She’s not hurt, bless you, not she. She makes that noise at times when she’s a bit off her head like.’

‘*Off her head! Mad,* do you mean?’ asked Tara, trembling. ‘How dreadful! I hope I shall not see her.’

The woman looked at her with a peculiar smile.

‘I don’t think you will,’ she said, quietly drawing the door to, which closed noiselessly as if propelled by a secret spring.

‘You need not remain,’ said Tara, anxious to free herself from her presence. ‘I have all I want, and can easily find my own way down to the drawing-room when ready.’

‘No, you *must not*. These are the rooms you are to occupy while you remain.’

‘Nonsense!’ exclaimed Tara, roused

and alarmed. 'Let me pass, please, *at once*. I want to speak to my cousin.'

'My orders are that you stay *here*, said Mrs Stubbs, dropping her servant's tone for one of authority. 'I dare not disobey them,' she added, gently pushing the girl back in order to draw out the key, which she replaced in her pocket.

'*Let me out!*' cried Tara, pale and frantic, as she tried to force open the door with all her remaining strength. 'Why have you dared to shut me in like this? What are you going to do with me? What is the meaning of such behaviour? Where am I? Woman, don't stand there staring at me! For God's sake! *tell me the meaning* of all this?'

‘You will soon find out for yourself,’ answered Mrs Stubbs significantly. ‘It’s no use making a noise. There, sit down and keep quiet, or it will be worse for you if you don’t. Ladies who have been obstreperous have never come out—no, not for years, out of this place. Here’s a seat,’ she added, attempting to take Tara’s arm and lead her to one.

But by a quick movement Tara wrenched herself from her clasp, calling for help at the top of her voice. Her cry brought Dr Seymour, who must have lingered in the vicinity, promptly on the scene.

‘What is the matter?’ he asked, in apparent amazement.

‘I want to go down to my cousin,

and this person will not let me out of the room," said Tara indignantly.

'No? Well, my dear young lady, the fact is, I ordered her to detain you until we had held a little consultation. Sit down, please—you are trembling from head to foot—and just tell me what has been the matter.'

'Another time; I cannot now. I wish to return to the Grange *at once*. May I ask you to unfasten the door?'

'Certainly. Take a seat one moment till you recover from this fit of fear. There now—that's a good girl; you'll soon be better. Lean your head against the cushion—so. You are faint, you see. Mrs Stubbs, go at once and order the carriage to be round at the

door in half-an-hour. Now then, how do you feel?' he asked, feeling her pulse as Mrs Stubbs disappeared on her errand.

'I am able to go down now,' answered Tara, attempting to rise.

'You are very weak,' said Dr Seymour, taking a small bottle and medicine glass from his pocket. 'Here, swallow this,' he said, pouring a dose out and holding the glass to her white quivering lips; 'it will revive you.'

Too ill to resist by this time, the poor girl obeyed.

'Now,' said the doctor cheerfully, 'take my arm; we will go at once. We have to acquaint Mr Orme of your decision.'

Tara rose, and with his support walked

partly across the room, when suddenly the light seemed to grow dim, an invisible hand at the same time appeared to press her temples and leaden weights to drag down her feet.

‘Oh, my God, I am dying!’ she cried, as she staggered forward, dizzy and blind. .

‘Nonsense; you will be all right directly,’ said Dr Seymour, as he caught her in his arms and carried her back to the couch, where she lay unconscious.

Once more feeling her pulse to ascertain that no real danger might be apprehended, Dr Seymour rang for a couple of attendants and left her in their charge.

Happy almost would it have been if that oblivion could have chained her

senses for long years to come, since her waking would be in that living grave, where, as surely as the dead, she had been

BURIED FOR GOLD!





CHAPTER II.

A HUMAN THORN.

BEREAVEMENT affects the human mind in different forms.

Some people take a morbid delight in treasuring up and gazing on mementoes of their dead, and comfort in living where they have dwelt, and lingering in the paths they have trodden.

Others, again, fly from all associations of the kind. The mere glimpse of a cherished token of the loved and lost

with this class of sufferers, causing the wound to bleed afresh.

It was in this latter fashion that grief visited Florian le Vismes. Thus, once having laid all that was mortal of his little sister in the pretty cemetery of Boulogne, the place grew hateful to him, and its painful associations so weighed on his spirits, that his health began to fail so that he determined on making a change. From his employers he got a letter of recommendation to a house of business in Paris, and thither he at once removed with his mother.

Faithfully adhering to his promise made to the dying, he worked hard in his leisure hours with his brush. Indeed, little incentive was needed, since

the love of art was bred in him. By degrees he met with purchasers for odd sketches done now and again, and six months after his arrival in Paris he received intimation that Rachie's picture, as he loved to call it, had been accepted by the Academy. From that hour he determined to follow a course which he had held in contemplation for some months back, viz., to throw up his situation and devote himself entirely to his artistic labours. This sacrifice, of course, in a great measure crippled his means, so that, in spite of his tardily acknowledged genius, he was poor—so poor at times as to be on the very verge of starvation; and as time went on making him better known, it was even then only by incessant

toil that he was able to earn a modest competency. But, alas ! for poor Florian ; poverty was not his only sorrow, for a human thorn was also there, ever rankling in his flesh. For Mrs Le Vismes had waited in vain for that fortune which she believed would be the means of placing her once more on the pedestal from which, through marriage, she had fallen. His sister's death and other difficulties having prevented her son taking steps to gain part of it for her as soon as he otherwise might have done. This delay caused the unhappy woman to become wretched and reckless, and she firmly believed that he conspired with the rest of the world to neglect and ill-treat her. Often the thought of

her imaginary wrongs wrought such mischief in her already excitable brain, that she became almost irresponsible in her fits of fury, and drove Florian to despair to know what course to take for the best. Then again she would relapse into sullen ill-humour, and upbraid him as the author of all her misery. And in addition to this, gradually she threw off those habits of refinement which had once marked her, and became reckless, utterly, in her abandonment of all forms of decency and decorum.

Florian's sensitive, excitable, and somewhat impatient nature was ill fitted to deal with one of this unhappy temperament. Had he been firm, yet gentle and tolerant to a greater degree of his

unfortunate mother's weaknesses, he might have gained an ascendancy over her. But, as it was, finding himself powerless to alter what by instinct he recoiled from, he fled from it to shut himself up with the art in which he found a panacea for all his woes, living in the world of beauty which his brush created. Unconsciously he was selfish, nevertheless, in yielding to this sweet infatuation, since it rendered him forgetful of the fact that his ill-fated mother, thus devoid of companionship, was left to brood over her morbid fancies. Naturally forgetful, he never for a moment realised the deteriorating influence of such isolation on one so constituted. But feeling unable to exercise forbearance towards her peevish

and unreasonable temper, he fancied he was acting wisely in thus shutting himself away from the risk of antagonistic encounters. Therefore, virtually so to speak, mother and child became as strangers, ignorant alike of each other's thoughts, sympathies or desires, as if divided by a hemisphere, and time revolving only widened the gulf between them. And worn by the struggle of poverty, and bearing the burden of home misery, Florian's years were told in a tenor of dull, grey monotony. One morning he suddenly remembered that it was his birthday. And then, as he fell to pondering sadly over the past and present, recollection brought to his mind the fact that he had entered his thirty-sixth year that day. He

started almost incredulously, for the years had passed so imperceptibly which stole his youth. Then, at length, when he was compelled to recognise the irrevocable truth that he had in all reality reached middle age, he mourned, ay bitterly, as for a living thing, the flight of his golden days, when hope was in the bud.

.
'Florian!'

He started at the tone, and, looking up from the portrait he was painting, saw his mother standing beside him with an open letter in her hand.

'It *has* come at last! at last!' she cried with feverish excitement.

'What has come?' asked her son, eyeing her with suspicious dread.

‘Don’t look at me as if you thought me mad,’ she snapped. ‘It’s the fortune, the money, Florian, for which I’ve waited all these dreadful years. I *shall* get well now. It is so blessed to feel rich. There, you can read for yourself.’

Her son took the black-edged letter, and read,—

‘MADAM,—It is our painful duty to inform you that your uncle, Henry Charteris, expired at twenty minutes past seven o’clock last Tuesday evening, and we are prepared to pay the moneys which you hold in your own right at his death as you may advise us.—We remain, your obedient servants,

‘W. & J. JENNINGS, Solicitors.’

‘I am not dreaming, am I?’ asked Mrs Le Vismes with pitiful earnestness as her son returned the letter.

‘No, mother, it’s all right. You’re a wealthy woman now.’

‘But how am I to get it? Must I go to England by myself?’

‘No; I shall go with you as soon as you can get ready.’

‘That need not delay us,’ she answered. ‘This is Friday; can’t we go to-morrow?’

‘No, mother, I couldn’t manage it. I must get the money for this picture first to take us there. Monday, if you like, I can be ready.’

Mrs Le Vismes gave a reluctant assent to this postponement, and at once com-

menced making preparations for her departure. With this space of time on hand, and the one thought in full possession of her brain, it struck her as necessary that her dress should be somewhat modified, so that she might appear before strangers the more worthy of her new position.

The weather happened to be unusually severe, even for January, and the snow lay several inches thick on the pavement. But nothing daunted, the moment it grew dusk and she could get Florian away from his work, she set out with him, dragging him from shop to shop in search of finery.

‘Mother, it is very foolish in you to persist in running such a risk,’ he re-

monstrated as they trudged home ankle deep in mud and slush, laden with flimsy parcels, on the Saturday night.

‘It’s all very fine in you to grumble,’ retorted his mother angrily. ‘How can I appear in the shabby clothes I’ve been wearing? But *you* don’t care whether your mother appears a fright before people or not. I do think you would be glad if I *was dead*.’

This was a customary form of retort, so Florian let it pass without making further reply. Only he saw it was useless to dissuade her from taking her own way.

But the chill biting wind and penetrating snow had their usual ill effect on a constitution naturally delicate and un-

accustomed to exposure. And so it came to pass that on Monday, the day fixed for leaving Paris, Mrs Le Vismes lay on her bed feverish and ill with a sore throat, symptoms which, on his arrival, the doctor at once saw indicated an attack of bronchitis. For the first few days, therefore, her sufferings completely absorbed her mind; but no sooner had convalescence set in than she racked her poor brain unceasingly with the possible ill consequences which might arise from her non-appearance to claim this heritage.

‘Florian,’ she said, one morning, finding him seated by her bed on which she had tossed with feverish restlessness throughout the weary night, ‘I don’t

seem to be getting well, and I've been ill so long as it is. The thought that something may prevent the money coming to us drives me mad. Could you not go to England and act for me, if I give you the power to do so?'

'Will it not be better to wait till you can go with me? I informed the lawyer of your illness, therefore the delay of a few days cannot materially make a difference.'

'Nonsense! That's so like you, Florian,' she whined. 'You would keep me out of it as long as you could. You have no filial affection. I might have the greatest stranger about me instead of a son. If you don't go I'll get up and crawl there, if it's the death of me.'

Look at me!’ she cried, stretching out her thin arms, and baring her poor, sunken chest, while the tears coursed down her sallow, shrivelled face, which had once been so lily-like and pure. ‘It was the *want of money* made me this — the thing I am. I couldn’t grovel in poverty; my life was cursed for lack of gold. And when I remembered I was poor through my own folly, I couldn’t bear the thought, and I tried to drown it—I tried to banish care—and I took— Listen, *come closer*; you never guessed, you never knew—I—I took *chloral*! Ay, you may start and stare at me, but it’s true. Oh, it soothed me; it was like heaven to feel all my sorrows gently leave me! And then I seemed

to sink down softly to nothingness, and sleep; and the world faded — faded the world. *I lost*— But then, see,' she sobbed, 'see how I am worn—worn to a skeleton—a miserable, unsightly wretch. I, who was once so beautiful and so beloved. A queen to rule men—a very queen. And now even my own son disobeys me. He won't go for the gold when it's there—and so sweet to one who has hungered for it so. I'm ill—I may be dying—but I want to feel rich for a day—even for a day. Florian, I bid you go *at once*, and if you set me at defiance may my cur—'

'Hush!' said Florian, shrinking from her. 'Not *that*, mother, not that. I've tried to do my best for you. If I failed I—'

‘Never mind what you have done now,’ retorted Mrs Le Vismes, her high treble voice quivering from excitement. ‘Much you cared what became of me, so long as you could dabble with your paints all day long. *Will you go?* Or must I?’ she asked, getting up in the bed and throwing aside the clothes.

‘Yes, I will go. Lie down again, mother. I promise you to start to-morrow.’

Florian’s first step was to take the doctor into his confidence. He told him everything relating to the fortune which had come at length to his mother, and also the deep anxiety he felt at leaving her ill.

‘Don’t fret about that,’ said the doctor.

‘You must engage an experienced nurse to look after her.’

‘But she refuses to have one.’

‘Oh, well, we must manage to get some one to take the servant’s place. Send the girl away for a holiday, and engage the nurse I send as taking her place. Leave it all to me. I will manage everything for you in your absence. I know a respectable woman who would take care of your mother. She asks rather high terms, however, but that would not matter now, I suppose.’

‘Certainly not; give her whatever she asks.’

‘Very well, then.; I think you may make your mind easy. Besides, each

day I shall call in myself, and write you a private bulletin.'

Florian thanked him, and could not help noticing the increase of respect and kindness in his manner; nor, in the bitterness of his soul, ascribing it to the near prospect of affluence, that magnet which rules the world.

.

Having at length made every arrangement which could conduce to his mother's comfort and well-being while away, he went into her room the last morning to say farewell, and was rejoiced to find her better in health.

'God bless you, my son,' she said, as she kissed him warmly, 'and thank you for all your goodness. When you come

back there will be no pinching, and for the few years I may have to live we'll try and be friends.'

Florian's tears fell freely as he took the poor wasted form in his arms and held her for a moment closely to his heart. It was the first time she had ever spoken lovingly to him that he could recollect, and the memory of her words sent him away with new feelings and strength to battle on for her sake.

Mrs Marcell, the appointed nurse, happened to be a woman of ingratiating manners, and as fortunate chance would have it, Mrs Le Vismes took to her, since, with untiring patience, she sat and lent a ready ear to the invalid's tales of past grandeur and the brilliant scenes

in which she had figured in her early days. In these relations the nurse gave her whole attention, and displayed an interest which Florian was never capable of showing, and so matters went on fairly well, and a fortnight had slipped away since Florian left, and his return was daily expected.

As the time grew near Mrs Le Vismes became terribly impatient and excited, so that Mrs Marcell could hardly snatch a moment's rest. The idea at last took possession of the sick woman that her son would send for her to go to him in England, where she would be required to enter into society once more, and in consequence the state of her wardrobe gave her the greatest concern.

‘I shall require to have a dinner dress in readiness,’ she remarked to the nurse, ‘because I shall be going among my own set again, who dress for dinner like civilised people. Here are my keys; just open that large trunk by the window, and see if you can’t find something suitable.’

The nurse obeyed, and drew out from beneath a wrapper a blue silk dress covered with tulle and lace.

‘Dear me, how faded and shabby it looks. I don’t think I could wear it.’

‘Why, of course you can, ma’am; it will do beautifully. I’ll shake it out nicely and hang it over the bottom of the bed. Then by morning all the creases will be out. There—see—that

will do. Now, can I get you anything more before I go to bed?’

‘No; if you leave me I’ll try and get a sleep. I’m very tired,’ was the answer.

After withdrawing to the little chamber allotted to her, Mrs Marcell, having made her preparations for retiring for the night, came into the sick-room once more. Mrs Le Vismes lay quietly, with her eyes closed, and believing her to be in a sound sleep she left her, and returning to her room, solaced herself for the worries of the day by imbibing a long draught from a flask which she usually carried, after which she was soon herself profoundly unconscious.

.

Florian had experienced little difficulty in arranging his mother's affairs. He had waited till everything was effectually settled, and was about to leave the hotel on his homeward journey, in fact, was in the very act of strapping his portmanteau, when a quick, impatient knock came to the door, and opening it, the waiter handed him a telegram.

With a foreboding of evil, he tore off the flimsy wrapper and read these ominous words :—

‘From J. Ellice, M.D.,

‘To Florian le Vismes.

‘Come at once. Mother dangerously ill.’

‘Any answer, sir?’ asked the waiter.

‘Yes,’ said Florian.

And as he wrote his hand shook like one palsied, and the cold sweat of terror broke out upon his brow. Prescient he had ever been that to leave his mother was to bring upon her evil in some way. The thought had kept him chained to her unhappy society. Now the dreaded calamity *had* come he knew, and in what shape he dared not question.

Travelling without intermission, he reached Paris, and as the fiacre stopped before the house in which he and his mother occupied a flat, he saw the closed blinds, and groaned aloud in anguish as he asked himself what fearful sight might not thus be veiled.

The doctor, waiting in readiness to

receive him, came to the door himself, and, taking his arm, led him gently into the dining-room, looking at him with the deepest compassion, for in his eyes he saw an expression of mute agony more appealing than the bitterest of human cries.

‘My dear sir,’ he said at length, laying his hand on Florian’s shoulder in kindly fashion, ‘I remained because I have to prepare you for what must needs be a severe shock to your feelings.’

‘I am in a measure prepared,’ said Florian, white as death. The dread of this has haunted me—the end which I have seen from the beginning has come. I have seen it in my dreams. I have not had one hour’s peace of mind since

I left. My God ! why did I not remain at my post ?'

The doctor poured out some brandy which he had in readiness on the side-board, and held it to the man's blanched lips.

'Drink this !' he said ; 'you will need all your strength to learn the truth.'

'Let me know it at once,' cried Florian, with piteous earnestness ; 'I cannot bear the strain of longer suspense.'

'Wait,' urged the doctor, 'just till you have rallied somewhat. Fatigue and anxiety has taxed your strength sufficiently ; rest a little.'

'My mother *is dead*. So the blow *has fallen*. Nothing can soften that truth,' replied poor Florian in low, agi-

tated tones. 'Give me some particulars, and let me go to *her*.'

Seeing that further remonstrance was unavailing, the doctor rang the bell sharply.

'Tell Mrs Marcell to come here,' he demanded of the girl who answered it with tear-dimmed eyes.

'Now, Mrs Marcell,' he said sternly, as the woman entered, dressed in the most dismal of mourning habiliments, and curtsied from one to the other, 'I wish you to tell Mr Le Vismes all you are able to relate about this melancholy affair.'

'I'm sure, sir, I can't tell how it all happened. It seems like a bad dream to me. All I know is, on that dread-

ful night Mrs Le Vismes seemed very restless and excited. Among other things, she ordered me to undo one of her trunks and take a blue silk dinner dress out of it—she seemed, poor lady, to think she was going to her son, and would want to wear it. She would have tried it on that night, had I not prevented her, and coaxed her to lie down. The doctor told me to be very careful to keep the bottle with the chloral out of her reach. However, in the early part of the evening she managed, when my back was turned, to get it and take some, but that was long before I left her. When I had persuaded her to lie down, she closed her eyes. I asked her if I could get her anything, and she said,

“No; I’ll try and sleep.” The doctor knows she would not let me sleep in her room, so I went into the little one next, and just unfastened my dress to rest for a few moments on the bed. Well, I was worn out, for I’d been up most nights for a week past, so I went off in a dead sleep like, and was woke out of it by hearing a fearful screech, followed by a dull, heavy fall. I sprang up instantly, all in a tremble from head to foot, and when I listened I heard a faint groaning like, so I was just able to get the candle lighted somehow, and make my way out of the room. I could hear that the sound came from the foot of the stairs, so I gave one look over the balusters—oh dear! I never shall forget that sight!

It grieves me, Mr Le Vismes, to have to tell you, but your poor dear mother lay there, huddled up in a heap, all of a blaze, and Madam Metra standing by her trying to put out the flames. It was awful, I can tell you, sir. It gave me such a turn that I fainted clean away. There's one thing, doctor,' added the woman *sotto voce*, 'I think it my duty to name that Madam Metra, the landlady, is given to taking a drop at times, and there was a brandy bottle half finished in the sickroom—where madam, it appears, went after I left Mrs Le Vismes, and—'

But the sentence remained unfinished, for at this juncture Madam Metra, without giving the slightest notice of her approach, rushed into the room.

‘She von bad woman! var’ bad!’ ejaculated the irate Frenchwoman, taking aim at the nurse with her finger. ‘She say I take drop—drop—*vat drop* she mean? Den I take half bottle of brandy! *Na-var, na-var*; dere vas no brandy in madam’s room. She tell von lie—von *much, big* lie. I vill tell you, monsieur. That night Madam Le Vismes ring her bell, she ring once, two times, *three* times; vell, me listen, no von come to her. “Ah!” me say, “I vill go to poor lady myself.” Vell, I go in de room, and I feel von great surprise to see madam dressed in robe of blue silk, with lace and tulle and ribbon—oh! *magnifique*!

“Madam Metra,” she say to me, “I am *so* ill—I have got cold trying on

dis dress, but it vas necessaire. When I go to my son I must wear it. Ah! I vas young, beautiful, gay when I put it on last; and now I worn out and thin, and sick with pain—in my chest, my heart, all over me.”

“You vill be better, madam,” I say. “Wait, I go fetch you something to make you vell.”

‘Then I run down quick and bring a *petite verre* of *eau de vie*. When I go into de room again, I look and see Madam Le Vismes standing before de fire, looking at herself in de mirror over de *mantel de cheminée*. When she hear me come in she start and turn round; and I give von great cry, for de *flamme* come like big serpent

all up de front of her dress. Vell, poor madam, she cry "*Help ! help !*" and rush like von mad—out of de room—alóng de passage. "De stairs ! oh, *mon Dieu !* Mind de stairs !" I call ; but, poor lady, she no hear me ; no see with fright. I run to catch hold of her, and grasp her dress ; but it parted like so much tinder, and I see her fall down, down to the bottom ! And I—'

'That will do. Leave the room, both of you, for God's sake !' said Florian distractedly.

'I vill speak my mind first,' cried Madam Metra determinedly, setting her elbows akimbo. 'Dat voman say I take drops. I drink brandy. I say, when de doctor came, she pre-

tend to be in dead faint; but she *drunk.*'

'Will you go?' repeated Florian, rising to pace the room. 'Doctor,' he cried appealingly, 'send them away in mercy—they are driving me mad.'

'My dear sir, I told you the details would be too harrowing to your feelings in your present state,' returned Dr Ellice, as he enforced Florian's command, by gently pushing the infuriated women outside the door.

Florian raised his bowed head, and looked the speaker full in the face. 'My mother should never have been left to herself a moment,' he said bitterly. 'No expense should have been spared to ensure this vigilance.'

‘ But money can’t ensure it from hirelings. All the precaution I considered needful, I took. Believe me, there’s a time for us all to go—and your poor mother’s had come. Had you been here you might have failed to avert the catastrophe. I will not keep you longer now ; but before I go, let me pray of you not to go upstairs to your mother’s room—you can do no good, and the sight would be most painful. I myself have undertaken to carry out the last sad duties, as far as I was able, without your sanction ; and I will call in again to-morrow morning to see what further assistance I can render.’

Florian thanked him briefly, though

his words impressed him little, literally stunned as he was by the magnitude of this calamity.

Heedless of the warning he had received, he rose, and with soft footfalls ascended to the chamber of death. On the landing he found Mrs Marcell awaiting his coming.

‘I do hope, sir, you won’t believe what that wicked woman said,’ she whispered, handing him the key of his mother’s room.

Florian made no reply, save to motion her away with an impatient gesture, staying for her to be out of sight before he entered—and then that sadly white-draped outline met his view, which brings a pang of agony to the mourner’s heart impossible to describe, when seen

for the first time. With a low wail of sorrow, the unhappy son knelt down reverently beside those poor charred mortal remains. With gentle and loving hands he folded back the sheet. Those who had been there before him had done their best to conceal the searing traces of the cruel fire, by braiding low over cheek and brow the traces of her fair faded hair.

‘O God! my poor mother, my darling, to see you like this!’ cried Florian, as he bent over her and kissed the cold, cold lips, while a paroxysm of grief shook his manly frame as a tempest might the slender twig.

With his sensitive nature his feelings had been crushed and trampled on by

her in life, till filial love grew numb and dead within him ; but looking on that piteous sight caused it to revive. If he could have laid down his life to bring her back he would have freely made the sacrifice, for the love lived again which had been so strong in his boyish days. Thus, therefore, his grief was all the keener when conscience smote him with the memory of the estrangement which had been between them in later years. And so in that lonely room he poured out his soul in a passion of remorseful sorrow, as though his loss had been one of the most devoted of mothers.

It was some weeks after the funeral before Florian could at all realise his position, or reflect. But when he did

so, he was conscious of having made a great mistake in the past. Seeing clearly as he lived in memory over days gone by, that he had given up the pleasures of youth, and stilled the promptings of ambition all to no purpose, since his mother had never been happier for his presence. Another, he told himself, would far better have supplied his place; been more lenient, more studious of what might have conduced to the happiness of that poor soul which had beat its pinions so wearily and impatiently against the prison bars of life.

Then, when he remembered the fortune which now he had the power to claim, the thought was bitter, since she could never share it. It had come *too late*.

She, who should have possessed it, had been compelled to wear poor dresses and subsist on scanty fare for lack of it, and therefore he turned from it with loathing, for in these first phases of bereavement he forgot the harshness and want of sympathy which had existed. No such recollection stirred within him, though in all, verily his young years had been embittered and blighted by the governless nature of the woman he mourned. For terrible is the power in this sense which one individual is apt to exercise over another. By 'a human thorn,' how deeply may we not be wounded; perchance the sore may rankle in the flesh till time shall end.

In Florian's case the hand of fate had plucked it out ere this, but left a cicatrice

which would never heal. All the spent days of his life left no sweet memory, no tender joy. He had only seen the world in its garb of avarice and greed. Poverty had taught him to sound its depths and springs as poverty *alone* can. Already a middle-aged man, the glamour of youth was gone, which might have lent a rose-hue to those pleasures the future might command. Sick, therefore, he felt of life, with a weariness no tongue could express. He had tried to do his best, but with only the sense of failure convicting him in the end.

Thus, therefore, there was not a sadder heart in all the French capital than the man's who had fallen into the possession of ten thousand pounds per annum.



CHAPTER III.

A CITY WAIF.

AS the iron tongues of the distant clocks tolled out the dying year, on a certain dismal, foggy New Year's eve, a gentleman passed down the well-lighted steps of his club into the dreary gloom of the streets. Buttoning up his overcoat, he walked on quickly through the dusk, turning into Waterloo Place. Here the sound of a girl's bitter sobbing smote upon his ear, and stopping to look, he beheld, seated on

a door-step, the figure of a young girl. Over her head was drawn a ragged woollen shawl of bright crimson. She sat there weeping, her face resting on one poor dirt-begrimed hand, while in the other she held a few boxes of fusees.

‘ Now, then, what’s the matter with you ? ’ he asked sharply.

‘ Nothing, sir. Please not to stay, else the bobby ’ll see me, and then I’ll have to chivey on, and I do be so tired. ’

‘ Well, but it’s time you did “ chivey on,” as you call it,’ persisted the stranger. ‘ You don’t mean to stay here all night, do you ? ’

‘ I *ain’t* agoin’ home,’ returned the girl resolutely.

‘Nonsense ; you’ll die of cold in the streets. Why won’t you ?’

‘‘Cos I ain’t took no money.’

‘Well ?’

‘Well, *can’t you see* why ? I darn’t show my face without it. Mother be awaiting for her gin, she be. She ’specks me to bring her money to buy it with ; and if so be as I don’t, why, she’ll thrash me, as she did last night. I be all of a pain now, I do, and I can’t bear no more. Look ; I ain’t tellin’ you no lies,’ she added, rolling back her sleeve as she spoke, and displaying a slender, well-formed arm, bearing the ugly black marks of ill-usage. ‘It pains me awful, it do,’ she went on, covering it beneath her shawl. ‘I think may be it’s broke.’

‘What a shocking person your mother must be,’ remarked her auditor.

‘She ain’t worse nor a lot more I knows. Only she wor drunk, you see, and she hit me with the broom handle.’

‘You?’

‘Hush,’ she whispered, interrupting him; ‘here comes a bobby. I’m off.’

She ran on as fast as her spent strength would permit towards the Strand; and possessed by some idle or curious freak, the stranger followed her. Soon he perceived that, exhausted, she sank down beside a railing, grasping it for support, and therefore he hastened his pace in order to reach her. But the instant the wretched girl perceived him. With a little cry she started up and took to

flight again, dashing down one of the side streets leading to the river.

The stranger's suspicions were, perchance, by this time roused; for he ran in the same direction with all his might, and overtaking her, panting and breathless, he caught her by the arm.

'Don't,' she cried, groaning aloud in agony. 'Didn't I tell you I'd got a sore arm. O Lord! how it hurts!'

The stranger instantly released the injured limb, but laying a firm grasp on her shoulder at the same time.

'Let me go, I say; will you? I ain't done nothin' to you. Oh dear, oh dear! I be dead beat; I wish I could sleep in the river to-night, that I do. Sally Lane, a young woman as lives next door,

throw'd herself in last week 'cos she was starvin', and her husband knocked her about so. Well, if I goes home to-night, I'll get served just the same. You see no one won't give me nothin'; not a blessed brown, though I've been a-asking of them since nine this mornin'. Oh, I be *so* hungry and cold, it ain't no good a-bearin' of it any longer. Nothin' can't hurt me when I am dead. Let me go, I say, or I'll call murder and perlice.'

'Now listen,' said the stranger sternly; 'if you don't remain quiet, I'll call a policeman myself and give you in charge for attempting to commit suicide.'

'What call had you to speak to me? I wish I hadn't told you. I wanted to

slip down to the river hours ago, only I was a-feared. I'm sorry I didn't now. You don't know what 'tis to have pain and cold and hunger all a-gnawin' of you ; a swell like you,—how should you ? Oh, if you knew how bad I feels, you wouldn't keep me livin' !' she cried, bursting into a passion of weeping.

‘However you may suffer, you’ve no right to take your own life, you—’

‘I don't know nothin' about *right* or *wrong*,’ she interposed vehemently, through her sobs. ‘I’m drove to it. No one will buy of me. If I begs, I gits locked up. I can't walk no further, and they won't let me lie on a door-step. I darn't go home—I *darn't*. Oh, it's all very fine for *you* to talk,

sir ; but you ain't like me, and you don't know what mother is when she be kep without her drink. She be mad. I say, kind gentleman, leave go ; *please do.* My brain be on fire. I loved poor Sally. She was kind to me, she wos ; and I can't be worse off nor she is in the river. Come, let me go, will you, for God's sake ? ' she entreated ; and as she raised her clasped hands appealingly, the ragged shawl fell back, displaying, by the light of the lamp where they stood, the tangled masses of her rich brown hair, which covered her wretchedly thin shoulders ; while her large blue eyes, looking with pitiful earnestness into the stranger's, shone with the fire of fever, like azure stars.

At a glance, in spite of her rags and misery, he saw that she was beautiful. The graceful form, the little hands, all stained though they might be, and the perfectly modelled face, entitled her to the heritage as surely as if she had been shrouded in lace and gems, the reigning belle of a season.

‘No ; you shall not go,’ he answered, with quiet decision.

‘What for ? Why should you keep me ? What do you want to do with me ? You ain’t a-goin’ to give me money ?’

‘For your brute of a mother to melt into gin ? *No*—that I certainly won’t. But I *am* going to help you ; and if you’ll only come with me quietly, I’ll take you where you shall have food,

and I'll get you new clothes. Only trust yourself to me, and I promise you no one shall ever beat you again, or even say an angry word.'

The poor distracted girl stared at the speaker in amazement, and then burst into a horrid unnatural laugh.

'You be a good un' to make game, *you be,*' she said. 'It ain't no use your chaffing a poor devil like me. Take off your hand, will you?' she demanded, waxing wroth at the mocker of her misery.

'I gave you your choice before, and I give it you again only once more. Either you come with me, or I give you in charge,' returned the stranger sternly. 'Now, which will you do?'

Strange that the girl, in her abject wretchedness, should hesitate. Did some phantom of a worse fate trouble her young soul. It was only for some moments she remained silent, with her eyes bent on the pavement; and then, with a heavy sigh, she raised her head, saying,—

‘I will go with you.’

‘Walk before me then,’ said her new friend. ‘I cannot be seen with you in those rags.’

The girl obeyed without a word, and he led her by degrees out of the busy thoroughfare into a series of narrow streets.

In one of these stood an eating-house, where viands, in the shape of congealed

soup, fried fish, and hard junks of beef, were displayed. The man had kept his shop open somewhat later, being New Year's night, but was in the act of putting up the shutters as the strangely assorted pair came up.

'Stop!' said the stranger imperatively, addressing the girl, who preceded him. 'Now, here's a shilling for you; go in there and get what you like to eat.'

'Is this a real shillin', and all for me?' asked the girl, receiving the coin on the palm of her hand, and eyeing it curiously.

'Have I not told you so? Now don't ask questions, but do as I bid you,' returned the donor somewhat testily; go in at once, or the place will be closed,

and ask them to give you a plate of meat, and I'll wait here outside for you.'

Thus directed, the girl entered timidly.

'Now, then,' said the proprietor, getting behind the counter. 'I've nothing to give you. Go out. We don't want no baggage like you coming here at this time of night.'

'I ain't *begging*,' replied the young Arab, adopting a little air of triumph.

'I wants a plate of meat.'

'Wants a plate of meat, do you? Where's your tin then?' asked the man gruffly.

For answer she laid the shilling on the counter.

'You've priggid it, I'll be bound,' he remarked. 'However, that isn't my

business. If I cut you the meat, you must take it outside. I can't have you stay to eat it here.'

At this moment, however, her conductor, having heard part of this discussion, entered.

'I gave this poor girl the shilling,' he said, 'for I found her literally *starving* in the streets. I know it's late, but if you could give her a hot supper of some kind, I'll pay you extra for your trouble. Here's half-a-crown to begin with, and if it costs more I'll pay you. There's a great deal of imposition to be met with from waifs of the highway, I admit; nevertheless this girl seems truthful; and, if one can believe her, her tale is a most pitiful one. I mean, at any rate, to see

into it; and if I find the case will bear investigation, I mean, as a magistrate, to rescue her from her brutal home.'

'You're very good, sir,' said the shop-keeper, as he bustled about and called to his small help to make some soup and fish hot, which edibles were ultimately placed before the girl.

Some spoonfuls of the soup she devoured ravenously, and then she laid down her spoon.

'Can't you eat it?' asked the stranger.

'No, sir, not now, thank you. I be hungry, but I gits sick when I eat.'

'Ah, you've fasted too long already. Look here, my man,' he went on, addressing the proprietor of this rough-and-ready restaurant, 'do you think you could

get a bed for this unfortunate girl anywhere? Nothing can be done to-night, you see, at this hour; but to-morrow I may get her into some institution.'

'Well, sir, I don't,' returned the man steadily. 'She be such an out-and-out ragamuffin, I can't see as any one would like to take her in.'

'I would pay well,' suggested the stranger.

'Hexcuse me, sir, but no pay wouldn't induce people to take such varmint under their roof.'

'Come,' said the stranger, turning to the girl, 'you must try your fortune elsewhere.' And the score being duly settled, they turned once more into the street.

‘Now, then,’ he said, stopping abruptly when they had proceeded some little distance, ‘what am I to do with you?’

‘Thank you, sir. Please don’t go to trouble yourself. You’ve been a sight kind to me. I feels warm with them wittles. I can wait in the streets now till mornin’.

‘Nonsense. Come, now, I’ll take you to your mother, and make it all right with her.’

‘No, sir—oh, please, *don’t*, for the love of heaven!’ cried the girl, her face paling with abject terror. Even if she let me be, Bill Jones would kill me; he threatened to stick me with a knife yesterday, and kicked me in the side after knock-in’ of me down.’

‘Who is Bill Jones then?’

‘Him as lives along wi’ mother. Oh, sir, you don’t know him! He’d kill you as lief as look at you. Never you heed me. I’ll get out of the way somewheres. But I ain’t a-goin’ home; I’ll die fust.’

‘Well, here’s a nice kettle of fish! I should like to know what I’m to do? Will you show me the way to the street where you live?’

‘No, sir. Please don’t ’ee go for to come; they be an out-and-out bad lot down our court. ’Tain’t fit for the likes o’ you to be seen in it. Maybe you’d get robbed—likely as not.’

‘Pleasant. Well, now, do you know of any one who would give you a bed

for the night, if I gave you money to pay ?’

‘Yes, sir, I think I do,’ answered the girl, after some hesitation.

Her companion reflected a moment, fixing his gaze on her beautiful down-cast face.

‘Chances are ten to one I’d never see her again if I gave her the money,’ he concluded.

‘Walk on a little,’ he said, addressing her at length. ‘Let me think what I had better do. Where does this person live ?’

‘Please, sir, her husband do keep birds and rabbits, and such-like live things; and I used to take her groundsel and chickweed in the summer. She lives at Lavender Court, just by Seven Dials.’

‘Well, take me to her shop.’

‘It will be closed now, sir.’

‘Never mind, we’ll try and make some one hear.’

How it might have fared on another night it is hard to say, but on this New Year’s eve Mrs Soloman, the proprietress of live birds and small quadrupeds, happened to be convivially entertaining a circle of friends in the small den dubbed back parlour.

‘La, sir!’ exclaimed the worthy woman, answering the stranger’s impatient summons, ‘you took me all of a heap; I thought the place had took fire.’

‘I’m sorry I alarmed you,’ was the polite rejoinder. ‘But the fact is, I found this unfortunate girl starving in the street.’

‘Why, bless me, I knows her; it’s Zell!’ interposed the woman, catching sight of the shrinking figure behind him.

‘So she told me,’ he went on. ‘Well, it appears she has been beaten black and blue by her unnatural mother.’

‘Bless you, sir,’ ejaculated Mrs Solomon, ‘she’s used to it; her mother’s fond of a drop, and when that’s the case the hand is free, like the tongue. How I come to know Zell was, her mother once lodged with me when I kep’ a shop down Drury Lane way. She was but a baby then, but since then the mother has gone to the bad altogether. Still Zell brings me green stuff when I wants it.’

‘Yes; well, why she brought me here was to see if you could let the girl have

a bed, as she is evidently afraid to go home, and then to-morrow I'll see about finding her some home or refuge.'

At this suggestion the woman instantly looked grave and reluctant.

'It be'nt as if I was alone,' she said, after some consideration, 'but you see, sir, I've got my old man, as is laid up with rumatis, to ask, and I can't say as I think he'd have the likes of her in the house. You see, sir, her mother's lost all thought for herself, and lives along with as big a ruffian as there is in London, and the court she comes from is one of the lowest. I be almost afraid to let her step inside my door.'

'Rubbish!' retorted the stranger; 'a young girl couldn't harm you.'

‘No, but look ’ee here, sir, how do I know that her folks ain’t a-goin’ to follow her, a downright bad lot as they are?’

‘But I tell you the girl is determined not to go back to them. In fact, she was about to make away with her life when I met her.’

‘Ay, well,’ returned Mrs Soloman, with a sagacious shake of her head, ‘and a deal better off she would be dead than among nothing but muck and drink and sin.’

‘Yes, but we don’t mean to let her stay longer mid such surroundings. But, in the meanwhile, I cannot spare more time to discuss the subject. What I want you to do at once is, to let me know if you can give the girl a bed, for

which I will pay you a half-a-sovereign in advance, and another when I come to-morrow.'

'Well, I'm sure, sir, you're wonderful kind. If you don't mind waiting a few minutes, I'll ask my old man.'

'Now, remember,' he said, turning to the girl as she disappeared, 'you're to remain till I come for you.'

'Yes, sir, I'll do as you bids me,' was the timid answer.

'Please, sir, my husband will be glad to take the lass, if so be it obliges *you*,' said Mrs Soloman, with a brightened face, as she returned from her spouse.

'Then that's all, I think,' said the stranger; 'only if you could endeavour to do away with these rags, and make

the girl clean and respectable-looking, I should feel obliged. I should never find a home for her in this state.'

'No, sir ; but you see my old man be bedridden, and I've no help from him, and clothes cost money, and—'

'Yes, yes, I know,' put in the stranger impatiently. 'I didn't expect you to find them at your expense ; here is another sovereign. Make her as presentable as you can, and to-morrow I'll settle any additional outlay you may have had.'

'I'm sure I'm grateful, sir,' said the woman, dropping a curtsey ; 'and Zell ought to thank her stars to think of having found so good a friend.'

'Zell !' he repeated ; 'what a curious name.'

‘ Please, sir, I was called Hazell—Zell short, you know.’

‘ Hazell what ? ’ asked the stranger.

‘ Torr, sir. Hazell Torr.’

‘ Very well, then, I shall call you Zell ; and now recollect to behave yourself till I see you again,’ he added, as with a curt ‘ good-evening ’ he vanished.

Once outside the limits of these narrow by-ways he hailed a cab, ordering the cabman to drive him to Westbourne Terrace.

‘ Shall I ring, sir ? ’ asked the driver, getting off his box as they stopped before the house indicated.

‘ Yes,’ was the answer ; ‘ and ask if Mrs Harper is in ? ’

‘ Mrs Harper is at home ; if you’ll please to walk this way,’ said the small boy in

buttons, as he came forward to take the stranger's card, and afterwards ushered him into a small private sitting-room.

Ten minutes or so later the rustling of silk announced a feminine presence, and the door opening, displayed the same pinched features and shifting reddish eyes of the *ci-devant* Mrs Bradley in the person of Mrs Harper, the now flourishing proprietress of a fashionable West-End boarding-house, and the bride of John Harper, Esquire,—for by such title he figured in the London Directory.

‘Why, *Mr Orme*!’ she exclaimed, in unaffected surprise. ‘How is it that you have waited till *now*? But I suppose you’re being the most exemplary of Benedicts accounts for it. Though, let me see, there

has been quite time for you to drop down from your seventh heaven. Why, you've been married a year and eight months ; how time flies. By the way, I've a crow to pluck with you ; you might have given me a few particulars of your marriage personally instead of leaving *me* to read the account in the papers like a stranger.'

'Ah, well, all there is to say about it you may learn in a very few words, and they are as follow:—I went to Paris, as you know, and there met a Mrs Green, a widow with sufficient golden charms to induce me to run my neck into the matrimonial halter, and since we have so far managed to hit it off pretty well together ; there is nothing

like plenty of money so well calculated to keep the springs of existence oiled. However, I have not come to talk of myself to-night, but of a poor girl I have found beaten and famished in the streets; she has no home, and I thought perhaps you might find her a place in your household as a servant, or in any other capacity you thought fit.'

'I!' cried his auditor, literally aghast. 'I take in an Arab off the streets! *No*; you must be mad to ask me. Look at my plate and furniture; could I consider them safe an hour with a creature probably out of a thief's nest in the house?'

Orme looked round at the costly articles with which the house seemed well gar-

nished, and remembered the luxury had been procured at his expense ; but it was hush money. So he uttered no reproach at her unwillingness to comply with his request.

‘I’m sorry you can’t take this girl,’ he said, rising abruptly ; ‘it would have been a charity ; however, if you won’t, you *won’t*, so it can’t be helped. And now I must run away, as I have a gentleman awaiting my return at the hotel. I shall look in—in a day or so, or at any rate before leaving town.’

‘Yes, do ; I’m sorry I couldn’t do you this service. But it’s out of the question ; the girl might belong to a gang of cut-throats who might come and murder us some night in our beds.’

‘You’ve but a poor opinion of human nature,’ remarked Orme as he shook hands.

‘Not worse than most people with my experience,’ she answered.

And Orme carried the sting of her parting words home with him.





CHAPTER IV.

THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM.



NOBLE, generous soul like Tara's was slow to believe in the depths of villainy which lurks in human nature. However, the truth dawned upon her at last, and she saw how she had been trapped and snared, and recoiled within herself at the infamy of the deed. Moreover, in spite of the horror of her position, she was conscious that her mind had become

clearer, away from the machinations of those whom, she now firmly believed, had, to feed their own avarice, *buried her for gold!*

Still, youth was left her, and its buoyant elasticity helped her spirit to rebound, once the agonised grief of facing her fate had worn off; while within the obscurity of her prison walls stole that golden-winged angel, Hope—the sweet comforter which is loath to leave the most wretched of human breasts—to whisper of escape.

Till this one aim took possession of the girl, and she prayed for the realisation of it—ay, as a parting soul might pray for deliverance—nevertheless, she abided her time; and in the interim was

so quiet, grave and docile, as to impress the bland proprietor with the idea that she had acquired resignation, purely unconscious as he was that day and night Tara's thoughts were far away, ever trying to pave a road to freedom.

To deal with his patient gently at first had been Dr Seymour's plan, perceiving, as he did, her delicate organisation and nervous, sensitive temperament, which forbade extreme measures ; and he was careful, therefore, not to jeopardise the life which yielded him eight hundred pounds per annum. Therefore, for the six weary months which had passed since her incarceration, she had been left much to herself, —not that Mrs Stubbs ever relinquished her vigilant watch over her, but other-

wise severe measures of restraint had not been resorted to.

Soon after her arrival, Dr Seymour had, in accordance with the rules of the establishment, as he stated, taken possession of the luggage, money, jewels, etc., which she had brought with her from the Grange. But Tara's grief was so intense at the loss of a locket, set with brilliants, and containing her grandfather's likeness, that, at her entreaty, he returned it to her, permitting her to wear it only inside her dress, and without chain or ribbon attached to it, and giving her the caution at the same time that any infringement on the rules laid down for the patients would result in its being taken from her irretrievably.

.

At the back of the asylum stood a long strip of garden, with walls so high, and an iron door so massive, as to instantly strike the beholder with the impression of its inaccessibility. The ground was prettily laid out with gravel walks among the green sward, adorned with flower-beds filled with brilliant blossoms, which tended, perhaps, to cheer the worn-out hearts of the poor patients marshalled there time after time to take their monotonous diurnal round of exercise.

And here Tara was permitted to walk an hour each day alone, save for the lynx eye of Mrs Stubbs, which never slumbered, and the presence generally of Jim Morris, a young man of about five-and-twenty.

wise severe measures of restraint had not been resorted to.

Soon after her arrival, Dr Seymour had, in accordance with the rules of the establishment, as he stated, taken possession of the luggage, money, jewels, etc., which she had brought with her from the Grange. But Tara's grief was so intense at the loss of a locket, set with brilliants, and containing her grandfather's likeness, that, at her entreaty, he returned it to her, permitting her to wear it only inside her dress, and without chain or ribbon attached to it, and giving her the caution at the same time that any infringement on the rules laid down for the patients would result in its being taken from her irretrievably.

.

At the back of the asylum stood a long strip of garden, with walls so high, and an iron door so massive, as to instantly strike the beholder with the impression of its inaccessibility. The ground was prettily laid out with gravel walks among the green sward, adorned with flower-beds filled with brilliant blossoms, which tended, perhaps, to cheer the worn-out hearts of the poor patients marshalled there time after time to take their monotonous diurnal round of exercise.

And here Tara was permitted to walk an hour each day alone, save for the lynx eye of Mrs Stubbs, which never slumbered, and the presence generally of Jim Morris, a young man of about five-and-twenty.

wise severe measures of restraint had not been resorted to.

Soon after her arrival, Dr Seymour had, in accordance with the rules of the establishment, as he stated, taken possession of the luggage, money, jewels, etc., which she had brought with her from the Grange. But Tara's grief was so intense at the loss of a locket, set with brilliants, and containing her grandfather's likeness, that, at her entreaty, he returned it to her, permitting her to wear it only inside her dress, and without chain or ribbon attached to it, and giving her the caution at the same time that any infringement on the rules laid down for the patients would result in its being taken from her irretrievably.

.

At the back of the asylum stood a long strip of garden, with walls so high, and an iron door so massive, as to instantly strike the beholder with the impression of its inaccessibility. The ground was prettily laid out with gravel walks among the green sward, adorned with flower-beds filled with brilliant blossoms, which tended, perhaps, to cheer the worn-out hearts of the poor patients marshalled there time after time to take their monotonous diurnal round of exercise.

And here Tara was permitted to walk an hour each day alone, save for the lynx eye of Mrs Stubbs, which never slumbered, and the presence generally of Jim Morris, a young man of about five-and-twenty.

Now, it so happened that Tara's beauty, her youth, and gentle bearing, together with a kind word now and then which she bestowed on him in passing, had touched the impressionable heart of this youth; moreover, from her manner he was convinced in his own mind that she was sane. But he could only turn the matter sadly over in his mind, being powerless to act.

One morning came, however, when Tara perceived that for some cause or other Mrs Stubbs had deserted her post of observation. So, fleet as a fawn, she stole over to where Jim was kneeling beside a bed, engaged in potting out geraniums, and touched him lightly on the shoulder. With a violent start he raised

his head, and looked up at the fair, wistful face, colouring crimson.

‘You look kind,’ said Tara, in hurried accents. ‘*Will you help me?* I am sane as you are. A cruel relative placed me in this dreadful place to defraud me of my fortune. Here is a locket for you,’ she continued, taking the glittering bauble from the bosom of her dress, and handing it to him. ‘Keep it till I am free, and then bring it to Everscourt Grange, Gloucester, and I will give you one thousand pounds for it.’

‘Take it back for the present,’ said Jim. ‘*Hush!* the old party has come; bend over the flowers, and pretend to admire them.’

Tara obeyed, thrusting the jewel back in its place.

‘That’s right,’ he remarked; ‘now she won’t suspect. Cheer up; I’ll help you. Take no steps yourself till I give you a signal—if you notice a slip of bay-tree stuck in my hat, conclude that I have made all ready for your escape.’

‘You seem to like these flowers,’ said Mrs Stubbs, in suspicious tones, coming close to the pair.

‘Yes,’ answered Tara simply, ‘they remind me of my own lovely flowers at the Grange.’

‘I daresay. Well, it’s time to go in now. You’ve been out a good hour.’

.

Tara’s offer set Jim thinking seriously; at his years he rather relished the somewhat romantic features of the case. ‘Be-

sides, if I do lose my place through helping her,' he reasoned, 'it won't so much matter. The wages are low, and it ain't lively; and if what the lady says be true, why, with a thousand pounds down, a fellow's made just at one go. I'll risk it, anyhow,' he concluded, and with this determination, being a smart, enterprising fellow, with a quick brain, ready for emergency, he set to work, without loss of time, to carry out his scheme; his first step being to gain an impression in wax of the key of the iron-door leading into the garden. This he took to a locksmith, and, professing that the original had been lost, got a new one made. But, although he now carried the means of exit about with him, it was

many days before he saw clearly an opportunity to make use of it. He was cautious, even though Mrs Stubbs relaxed her supervision, somewhat fearing it might be only a device on her part to gain confirmation of her suspicions. So Tara looked in vain for the twig of bay leaf.

The opportunity came at last, however, unexpectedly.

In the asylum there happened to be a fine-looking man about fifty, who in some way had excited the hatred of his keeper. It would distress the reader, to no purpose, to detail the cruel indignities *in toto* which fell to the lot of this unhappy being. He had been struck, kicked, mopped, and spat upon by the brute, who took a delight in making him feel

the utter powerlessness of his suffering humanity. On this afternoon of which we write, perchance a feeble ray of reason struggling back made him conscious of his trampled manhood, so that he turned in defiance upon his keeper A desperate struggle ensued—followed by the piercing shrieks of the frantic man as they dragged him off, and beat him forthwith till his cries of murder rent the air—so piteously, that Mrs Stubbs, for once thrown off her guard, forsook her patient and rushed into the house. Tara might have followed, had not Jim Morris appeared at this moment.

‘Stay,’ he said, holding up his finger warningly, ‘they’ve knocked the life out of an unfortunate fellow in there; but

you can't do no good by going in. There's sure to be a fuss about it. Therefore, now's your chance to escape. *Now, or never.*

'What am I to do?' asked Tara, trembling with eager expectation.

'I'll show you,' said Jim, as he drew the spurious key from his pocket. 'Now,' he continued, 'I'll open the door with this, and when you get outside, I'll close it again, and fling you the key over the wall, pick it up, and take it with you; were it found I should be ruined. Once without, go on as hard as you can along the little path opposite, which will lead you through the shrubbery. There is a wicket-gate at the end; it is locked, so you will have to climb the hedge. I have cut it low at one side; then keep on

through the field, bearing always to the right, till you get on the highroad, turn then to the left ; and about half-a-mile distant you will reach a little village, ask some one there to direct you, and they will show you a short cut through the lanes, which will take you direct to Gloucester.

‘ May God reward you for your goodness,’ said Tara fervently, as she took the locket from her breast and slipped it into his hand. ‘ Come with this either to Mr Finchley’s, solicitor, Gloucester, or the Grange, and you shall receive a thousand pounds.’

The youth nodded, and laying his finger on his lips, to prevent Tara saying more, turned the key softly in the lock. Then,

as the huge barrier fell back on its hinges, he gently pushed the affrighted girl through, silently closing the gate once more behind her.

Poor Tara only waited to raise the key, which he threw after her, ere, with a beating heart, she took the path directed, and fled along it like a stricken deer.

.

The confusion caused by this unwonted retaliation soon died out in the asylum, and the keeper, burning with ire, and, having recovered presence of mind, considering that his charge had not yet even received sufficient castigation for his offence, hauled his wretched victim by main force into the padded room,

where with one well-aimed blow he sent him reeling on the floor, where, as he lay, he knelt on his breast, crushing the breath almost out of his quivering body, till his groans had died away in sheer insensibility.

In the dead silence which now reigned, Mrs Stubbs bethought herself of her own charge, and made all speed to reach the garden. Here she discovered Jim placidly occupied in trimming a border of box-wood.

‘Where’s the lady?’ she asked, looking round anxiously.

‘How should I know?’ answered Jim coolly, as he rose and wiped the edge of his shears upon his coat sleeve.


‘But I left her here, I tell you. You

must have seen where she went to,' persisted Mrs Stubbs.

'It ain't my business to watch her,' retorted Jim evasively. 'I've got my work to do; and I ain't got time to trouble about other people's. You best look for her in the house. If she wor here now,' he added reflectively, 'she'd be safe to remain, for it ain't likely she could climb those walls, is it now?' pointing with his shears to the tall mass of brickwork, 'nor that that there door *could* open without a key,' and having delivered this bit of logic, he knelt down again and went on assiduously with his clipping, while the unhappy Mrs Stubbs, driven frantic almost, commenced a diligent search, destined to end in vain.'

The truth at length had to be conveyed to Dr Seymour's ears—on which he flew into a towering rage, cursed the refractory patient who had caused the disturbance, vowing he should suffer for it ; called Mrs Stubbs into his presence, dismissing her on the spot. He then went in quest of Jim, and having accused him in anything but gentle terms of want of attention, sent him also about his business. Returning, he now vented his anathemas freely on the whole household for not having instantly informed him of the girl's escape ; despatched several keepers on various scents ; and finally ordered his carriage, and started for Gloucester, where he meant to give information to the police.

His thorough-bred pair of bays bore him



rapidly over the ground, seated on the box with the driver. From time to time he looked through a powerful field-glass which he carried in his hand, and which, to the uninitiated, gave him the appearance of a lover of nature intent on surveying her beauties.

Suddenly he lays his hand upon the reins, bringing the spirited horses to a standstill with a jerk, for a vision darkens his binocular—and 'tis that of a woman flying as if for dear life.

He stays to note the path she takes across the fields, then turning to the coachman, orders him to drive on as hard as he can go. The coachman, with only his natural eyes to depend on, sees no reason for the command, but in blind obedience

urges on the horses to the top of their speed.

‘Stop!’ he cries again as they near a bend in the road, and here dismounting, he vaults over the stile like a school-boy, and rushes down the path with volitation which belies his years.

Breathless at length, he pauses a moment to use his field-glass, through which he descries the object of his pursuit hesitate, then stagger on a few paces, and finally sink to the earth. He knows her strength is well-nigh spent, and so waits to see from his post of observation whether or no she is capable of making a fresh effort, and if so, in which direction.

There happened to be a thicket of

bushes and brambles almost skirting the path, and for shelter beneath this cover, like some poor hunted hare, in a little time he perceives the unhappy girl crawl. Satisfied on this point, he now hastens by a circuitous track to reach the spot.

Although noiselessly almost his footsteps press the sward, nevertheless there is sufficient sound to strike the strained ear of the fugitive. Starting up, she sees the dreaded figure in the distance, and with one bitter cry of fear and pain she springs from her lair, pressing forward with her tottering limbs madly, wildly, looking neither right or left, till a firm grip laid on her shoulder swings her round, and she finds herself face to face with her foe.

‘A pretty dance you’ve led me!’ he exclaimed; ‘but I’ll pay you out for it; see if I don’t. Come now, no resistance. ’Twill be worse for you if you attempt it.’

‘I won’t go back—I’d *die* first!’ cried Tara defiantly.

‘We’ll see about that,’ answered her captor as he cast his arm about her waist, and thus partly carrying and partly dragging her, he bore her along with him. Tara struggled desperately; but what was all the strength of her weak and wornout body pitted against the determined will of a powerful man.

As they reached the carriage, Tara knew that she was within earshot of the little village through which

she had passed, and in consequence redoubled her cries, thus succeeding in bringing some of the residents in hot haste on the scene.

‘What are you doing to the lady?’ they asked in succession as they witnessed her frantic efforts to free herself from his clasp.

‘Taking her back to the asylum, from which she has escaped,’ answered the doctor; ‘have a care—she is *mad*!’

‘*No*,’ cried Tara passionately, ‘I am *not*. Oh, good people, *do* hear me, and for God’s sake help me if you can. Believe me I am sane as any of you; but a cruel relative put me away to get my money, and if you let this bad man take me back I shall die in

that dreadful place, and no one will ever hear of me again. Help! I say help, for the love of Heaven! I have plenty of money to give you if you set me free.'

The little throng pressed forward eagerly.

'Stand back,' cried the doctor imperatively; 'you are only exciting my patient, fools that you are. She has a knife in her possession, and is *likely* to murder any one of you, as not, if she gets loose.'

'It's Dr Seymour of the asylum close by, sure enough,' said an old crone, addressing the others, 'I knows, for my gal be in the laundry. Bless 'ee what's the good of standin' their gapin'. The lady's daft, safe enough, poor soul; she do rave

just as my Tom did afore they took him off to th' madhouse.'

'Here, you hold the horses heads a moment,' said the doctor, addressing a burly-looking fellow with his hands in his pocket, 'and you,' he added, beckoning to the coachman, 'get down and assist me.'

And so between them they raised the now almost fainting girl into the carriage ; a moment sufficed for Dr Seymour to follow and take his seat beside her, while the coachman mounting once more drove on at full speed, leaving the discomfited spectators to make their various conjectures.

.

But Dr Seymour's troubles were not confined to Tara's escapade, for as he drove

through the thickly-wooded avenue up to the door, an attendant met and informed him that the refractory patient was dead—a fact which bitterly annoyed him, contemplating as he did the inquiry which must needs follow.

Concealed behind the shrubs which sheltered the side of the house, Jim watched, and when he saw Tara alight felt the conviction that further efforts on her behalf would end as vainly. Therefore, deeming discretion the better part of valour, he resolved to be silent with regard to the part he had taken in aiding her escape.

Having dismissed his equipage, Dr Seymour hurried his victim into his private study, locking the door after him.

‘Now,’ he cried, white to the very lips with anger, as he confronted her, ‘what do you mean by such conduct?’

‘To escape,’ answered Tara firmly; ‘and I will make the attempt again if I get the chance.’

‘Ay; now that brings me to the point,’ roared the doctor; ‘how did you get the chance this time?—answer me, directly.’

‘I won’t,’ said Tara; ‘I never will tell you,’ she added, with a boldness which amazed her inquisitor.

‘I’ll find the means of bringing you to your senses yet, young lady,’ he retorted. ‘To begin with, I revoke all the indulgence I granted you. So hand over that locket I permitted you to wear.’

‘I threw it away least it might lead to discovery,’ she answered, her heart bent on shielding the man who had sought to liberate her.

‘That’s a lie,’ retorted the doctor furiously; ‘don’t attempt to throw dust in my eyes. You gave it to some one to let you out. Who was it? You’d best make a clean breast of it.’

‘I won’t say more than I have said; you can’t command my tongue by brute force, as you have my body, and so I defy you!’ exclaimed Tara, the warm flood manteling her cheeks.

‘*Do you?* Take that then for your confounded insolence,’ returned the doctor, striking her a heavy blow on the side of the head, which, in Tara’s weak state,

sent her reeling, and falling on her forehead, came in contact with the edge of a cabinet, and from the wound thus inflicted the blood soon began to flow copiously. Nevertheless, the sense of the outrage she had suffered fired her spirit with indignation, so that pain and every other sensation was deadened. And she rose in her bruised beauty, like a young goddess, to confront her oppressor with beating heart and flashing eye.

‘Scoundrel! thief! traitor!’ she cried, ‘you are *paid* to keep me here. You share my money with a villain who calls himself my cousin. You coward, to strike a helpless creature at your mercy, and that creature a woman. But I may yet live to expose and punish you for having

joined Treilhard Orme in the foul plot which has robbed me of my possessions and liberty. Leave me, or let me go; I hate to see you!’

‘Indeed! and so you *dare* to adopt this tone to me! very well. Now you shall suffer the consequence.’

He rang the bell as he spoke.

‘Take this patient to the padded room,’ was his order to the two stout keepers who answered his summons; ‘I will follow, and when you get her there put the straight-jacket on, for she is attacked with a violent form of madness.’

With rough hands the women seized the unfortunate girl at his bidding, and carried her between them into this chamber of horrors, and here, as they proceeded

to case her in the awful garb of insanity which the doctor had prescribed, Tara uttered a shriek so piercing as to reach the ears of the doctor's wife, who happened to be in the asylum at the time, and cause her to force her way into the room.

'Save me!' gasped the poor girl, appealing to her, with the breath dying out as it were, of her constrained body, and then with a heavy sigh she fell a lifeless weight upon the ground.

Mrs Seymour uttered a little exclamation of dismay, and going up to her husband, shook him roughly by the arm.

'You have parted with your reason, I think,' she whispered. 'Look at her! don't you see she is *dead*, and you have lost eight hundred pounds a-year.'



CHAPTER V.

FLORIAN'S FATE.

THE season was at its height in town, and on a certain evening the greater part of the world of fashion flocked to the opera-house to hear a famous singer. Among the latest who entered after the overture had been played was a remarkably handsome man between thirty and forty.

‘Haven’t a place left, sir,’ said the man in charge, as he presented himself at the box-office. ‘They’ve been booked

a week or more before. It's a favourite opera, you see, sir, and they expect royalty to-night.'

An elderly man, loitering in the vicinity, had evidently listened to the foregoing remarks, for he now approached the stranger, saying,—

'I don't mind selling you my ticket, if you are willing to give a little more.'

'For what part of the house is it?' asked the stranger.

'Amphitheatre stalls.'

'Oh, they are fearfully high up and stuffy.'

'Yes; but you won't find standing-room elsewhere.'

'No, I suppose not. Very well, then,

'I'll give you double,' returned the stranger, noticing how shabby and poverty-stricken the old man looked, and presuming he had hit on the barter of tickets as a mode of speculation.

Fagged with the amount of climbing he had to undergo, the stranger was about to sink gratefully into his destined seat, when a sweet low voice said,—

'Excuse me, sir,' and at the same time a tiny hand removed from it a book and opera-glass.

'I beg your pardon,' said the stranger, and, looking at the speaker, his eyes met eyes of the tenderest blue, deep as spring violets—eyes which exercised a magnetic influence upon him, so that he sat spell-

bound, not daring to encounter their glance again till the opera had proceeded some length.

When he did gain sufficient courage to look, however, they were turned away from him, gazing intently on the stage. Therefore he had the opportunity to examine her more critically, and perceived that she was young, not more than seventeen at the most, and of rare and singular beauty; possessing an oval face, delicately coloured as a bit of porcelain; small, perfectly chiselled aquiline features, a low forehead, with rounded temples and arched brows, and eyelashes of dark brown. Her hair massive, smooth as satin and fine as a cobweb, was of a lighter hue, a soft

hazel, and coiled in numberless plaits at the back of her small head. But perhaps the most perfect feature in the girl's loveliness lay in the perfect modelling of the hands resting on the lap of her plain, black silk dress, so small and white and dimpled were they, and so tapering were the fingers, tipped with rose-hued nails raised like filberts.

Not one of these perfections were lost on the man gazing upon her; he drank them in, one after another, till they led his senses captive, and he became intoxicated as one who had unwittingly drained goblet after goblet of a potent wine. And so the music, the prima donna, and the peopled theatre became as things of nought to him, his whole

soul being filled with the living picture at his side.

.
At last the curtain fell, 'mid ringing applause, and he perceived that the people seated next to her, and with whom he supposed she had come, moved rapidly away from her, and furthermore, to his surprise, that this beautiful girl was *alone*. This fact, perchance, emboldened him to address her.

'May I help you?' he said, offering his hand to assist her in mounting the precipitous ascent leading to the doorway.

'Thanks,' she answered, taking his hand with a grateful smile.

‘Pardon me,’ he continued, thus encouraged, ‘but I should be so delighted to be of any service to you in my power, as you are alone.’

‘It’s very good of you.’

‘Not at all. I will stay here if you permit me till you get your cloak.’

‘Oh, I never trouble about such things,’ said the girl with a bright smile, as she unrolled a water-proof cloak which she had carried bound together with a strap, and took from the parcel also a seal-skin turban hat.

‘You’re a sensible girl to avoid the crush and scrimmage for wraps in there,’ remarked the stranger, as he helped her on with her cloak. ‘Now, before you go, let me get you a glass of wine.’

‘No, thanks.’

‘Some lemonade, or an ice, then?’

‘I *would* like some lemonade. It was stifling in there.’

‘Yes, and for that reason you must be careful of taking cold. Now,’ he said, after having returned the empty tumbler, ‘take my arm, and when we get downstairs, if you will wait, I’ll go for a cab.’

‘Thanks, but I’d rather go out with you. There will be more chance of finding one a little way down the street.’

‘But you are hot, and I dread your going into the night air.’

‘Oh, I’m not afraid of it,’ answered the girl gaily.

‘Would you let me see you home?’

he petitioned, after they had sauntered on some distance, and at length secured an empty cab.

‘*No*,’ she answered emphatically; ‘I dare not. You must not even ask where I live. Say good-bye here at once before I get into the cab.’

‘In all things I will obey you, if you can give me the hope of seeing you again.’

He took her hand and held it firmly as he spoke; and as his dark eyes dwelt ardently on her blushing face, he felt it tremble.

‘Do you *really* wish it?’ she asked, in low faltering tones.

‘Yes; as I have wished for few things on earth. If you drift away from me now and forget me, I shall feel that a

happiness I have never known before has gone out of my life. Child, you cannot understand how strangely you have moved me. I will not follow or molest you in any way. I leave it with you only. If you will meet me I shall feel grateful beyond all words. Will you trust me?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, where may I see you, and when? To-morrow?’

‘*To-morrow*,’ repeated the girl nervously. ‘If you do care so very much.’

‘You must see I care. At what place shall our meeting be?’

‘At the Marble Arch, if you can come there,’ she answered, after some hesitation.

‘Of course I can. I will come to any place you appoint. And the time? I will be there at whatever hour may suit you.’

‘Well,’ said the girl, ‘four o’clock will do.’

‘Thank you. Now, have I your promise that you will not fail me?’

‘If I trust you, you must trust me, and I have given you my word,’ she said, leaving him abruptly and stepping into the cab, which at once drove off.

Long before the clocks had told out the appointed hour, the hero of this adventure sought the trysting spot, and as he walked to and fro there, he began to question himself as to whether he had not committed an act of folly in

asking this girl, with her witching beauty, to meet him ; and he had well-nigh worn out conjecture as to what her social position might be. He knew the magic her sweet face had for him, and it grieved him to remember the circumstances under which they had met, which, to say the least, were anomalous.

His meditations came to an end, however, by the voice which, in spite of all his scruples, he was longing to hear, saying,—

‘How are you? I have been as good as my word, you see.’

‘And I have to thank you for it,’ he said, as he raised his hat respectfully, feasting his eyes at the same time on the delicate symmetry of her girlish form

attired in a tight-fitting dress of dark blue cloth richly braided.

‘I hope you managed to get home safely last night?’ he inquired at length.

‘Yes, thanks, and so enjoyed the opera,’ was her ready response.

‘You like music then?’

‘With all my soul,’ she answered, raising her eloquent blue eyes to his. ‘It is the one thing in the world which gives me pleasure.’

‘You sing yourself, I suppose?’

‘Yes; I have a good voice, at least the master to whom I go once a week tells me so. It was he who gave me the ticket for the opera, and he had only one to give away, so rather than miss it I went alone.’

This little confession relieved the mind of the listener in a great measure, for the desire in his soul was to believe that this exquisite human flower was pure and good.

‘Did you tell them at home of your little escapade?’ he asked.

‘Yes; they know my passion for music, and would not hinder me.’

‘*They*—who are *they*?’ he inquired, bringing the rose tint to her face with his eager eyes.

‘Did I say they? I ought to have said *she*,’ was her confused reply. ‘I live with an old lady.’

‘No one else?’

‘No—not a soul. How inquisitive you are.’

‘I beg your pardon; I am interested.

Don't you find it dull without companions of your own age ?'

'At times.'

'Well, now,' went on her companion persuasively, 'don't you think you could coax this old lady to let me come and see you. I'll promise to be so good, and read to her, and wind her wool, and look for her spectacles.'

'Would you *really*?' asked the girl, with a merry laugh. 'Surely you must have a pair of wings concealed beneath that overcoat.'

'I wish I had,' he answered; 'for then I could fly after you and discover your abode.'

At this speech the girl's manner instantly changed and became very grave.

‘You must never think of finding me out,’ she said; ‘for I should only get blame and unkind treatment through it.’

‘God forbid I should bring any sorrow on you,’ he replied. ‘But are you going to tell me that I am never to see you after this?’

‘No; we can meet in the same way as we have to-day,’ she answered, with a ready acquiescence, which somewhat puzzled her admirer.

‘You are very good,’ he hastened to say; ‘and as you permit me, I shall come to our rendezvous of to-day every afternoon during my stay in town.’

‘Don’t you live here?’ asked the girl, with a shade of disappointment in her tone.

‘No—in Paris.’

A pause followed after this announcement.

‘I have a favour to ask,’ said the stranger, breaking it after they had walked on some distance. ‘I want you to tell me your name.’

‘Why should you care to know? Living so far off, you will return and forget me.’

‘You wrong me,’ he answered, almost angrily. ‘Whatever may come to pass, I shall *never* do that. I did not put the question out of idle curiosity.’

‘No? Well, then, my name is Zell Torr.’

‘An odd name rather.’

‘Yes; Zell is the short for Hazell. I

was called Hazell on account of the colour of my hair, by my mother, I believe.'

'Ah! she is dead, I presume?'

'I have no mother,' answered Zell, with a sad and sudden reserve, which went straight to the man's heart and checked further inquiry.

'I have told you as much as I can about myself, so am I not entitled to ask you to let me know your name?' said the girl at length.

'Certainly. Let me see, I have got a card, I think.'

As he spoke, he drew out his cardcase and handed her one, with simply 'Florian le Vismes' written upon it.

'Le Vismes!' exclaimed Zell; 'why,

that is quite as uncommon as mine. A foreign name, is it not ?'

'Yes ; but my mother was English, so I am a kind of hybrid. By the way,' he added, 'if I may see you to-morrow, I can bring you some tickets for a very good concert.'

'I can see you to-morrow, if you wish,' returned Zell, 'but don't bring the tickets.'

'Why not ?' he asked in surprise.

'Oh, because questions might be asked, if I went, which would lead perhaps to suspicion, and then there would be no end of a row.'

'My poor child,' said Florian very sadly, 'how I wish you would give me your confidence.'

‘One day I may, but not now. *Don't* ask me. I have risked a good deal as it is in meeting you,’ said Zell, with some agitation. ‘If I was observed I should never be able to see you again, so you must not be vexed if I run away now.’

Florian's face instantly became gloomy and anxious.

‘Perhaps our next meeting had better be in a less public spot?’ he said.

‘Yes, I think so,’ she answered; ‘it would be quite as well to be cautious.’

‘Very well, I leave it to you to say where you can see me. All places will be alike, so far as I'm concerned.’

‘Then,’ answered Zell, after reflecting for some minutes, ‘I think I'd better fix on St James' Park. I shall be

on one of those seats by the water. I don't imagine I should be noticed there.'

'And the hour? Would three o'clock suit you?'

'Yes,' answered Zell. 'I will try and come as soon after three as I can. And now I must say good-bye,' she added, offering her hand, which Florian pressed warmly.

'May I not turn a little way back with you?' he pleaded.

'No,' she returned, as with a farewell nod she hurried away and passed through one of the park gates.

.

Many meetings had followed this assignation, and the result was, that Florian

le Vismes began to know surely that in the shape of this fair girl, shrouded in mystery, he had met *his fate*. Unheeding he had let his heart go out of his keeping. He loved her with the passion of youth and the strength of a man—and a man who had not been wont to fritter away his affection on a variety of fleeting fancies. No, this girl had been the *first* to trouble the depths of his great earnest soul. And mirrored there, she had become the very being and essence of its life. The more he saw, so much the more did he set her up in his estimation as his ideal of all that was pure and sweet. While the glamour growing upon him so intensified her beauty in his eyes, as to create a

sense of humility with regard to himself and his power of winning it.

Now, for the first time he beheld in the glass with dismay and despondency the grey hairs which had crept insidiously among his bright dark locks, and which hitherto he had been too deeply engrossed in his art to notice, and he mourned the dead youth he could never bring back only for her sake.

‘ Could she love a man twice her age ? ’ he asked himself bitterly, and with less than her *love* he would never be content. Brooding thus, by degrees he put the hope of ever possessing it from him. All his life had been a struggle and a disappointment, he told himself, and this fresh sorrow was only in keeping with

the rest. Many a sleepless night he passed, in the which he tried to banish her image; but he found that the more he tried to break the spell of this passion the more surely it bound him even to the exclusion of that dearly-loved art which had been his *world* in the days gone by. At length, however, letters came necessitating his return to Paris, and roused him somewhat from the absorbing worship into which he had drifted.

Feeling compelled to conceal his passion, he put on a mask of coldness when he met Zell on the eve of his departure, and the girl, conscious of his change of manner, grew timid and embarrassed.

‘Are you really going to-morrow?’ she

asked, after there had been a long silence between them.

‘Yes, mademoiselle, perhaps it will be best.’


‘Perhaps so,’ she answered with some pique.

‘Especially since you have told me that music claims all the love you have to bestow.’

‘I told you the truth when I spoke,’ she stammered.

‘And now—could you say the same thing now?’ he asked eagerly.

‘Yes, I am not one of your changeable beings,’ she answered, dropping her eyes beneath his gaze, with a tell-tale blush to belie her words, had a man of the world read her speaking countenance.



But Florian had had little experience in women's wiles or coquetries. So, simply giving her credence as he remarked,—

‘Well, at any rate, you have been wise in placing you're love where you are least likely to meet with disappointment, nevertheless, you *will* know a different love one day.’

‘Shall I?’ asked Zell, her cheeks burning; ‘ah! well, sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.’


‘With your gifts you will have the power to give either great happiness or pain in the future,’ said Florian gravely.

‘We are not all free to shape our own line of conduct,’ she replied sadly. ‘For instance, you must have thought me very ungrateful in keeping my address so long

a secret from you. But until I knew you better I had no alternative. Fear prevented me. I am, you see, a poor girl, utterly dependent on the charity of the person who supports me, and in some things leaves me to do much as I like. But one hint about my having spoken to a gentleman, or one letter from an unknown friend, would bring a heavy punishment upon me; indeed, I might be turned out into the dismal streets.'

'What! *do* you mean to tell me that you are subject to harshness and cruelty?' exclaimed Florian, firing up as he pictured her wrongs in imagination.

'*No!* don't mistake me, I am not ill-treated. I have everything I want in *one* sense—plenty to eat, beautiful dresses to




wear, and money to spend, and yet, in another, I am a slave.'

Florian reflected ; his pure, unselfish love for this girl made her well for his first study. She had strung, nevertheless, a chord of passion in his bosom, and with its sensuous charm throbbing in every nerve, he winced at the fatherly tone he felt compelled to adopt in offering her advice.

'I am so many years older than yourself,' he began, 'that I take the privilege granted to age and experience to warn you against surreptitious introductions and acquaintanceships. In the future, the lady with whom you live has a perfect right to interdict anything of the kind ; I, myself, was extremely culpable in

speaking to you as I did. And now that I know you to be as good and true as you are beautiful, I ask your pardon for it ; nevertheless, I assure you, your being quite unprotected gave me a certain licence to do so. In such an atmosphere of evil as surrounds a great city, innocence—and youth requires a constant counsellor at hand—no young girl should run such risks. I am surprised if, under strict control, that you are permitted to go out in London alone as you do. Remember I am no better than my neighbours, and have no reason to preach, but I am deeply interested in you, so this must be my plea for venturing to speak as I have done. I hope you are not offended with me ?'



Zell hung her head as the tears welled up and gathered in her deep blue eyes.

‘Now I have distressed you—what a brute I am!’ cried Florian, seizing her hand impetuously, and carrying it to his lips. ‘Forgive me—*can* you?’

She looked up with a sudden radiancy beaming through her tears.

‘Forgive you? I have only to be grateful for—for—your friendship,’ she added, after some hesitation. ‘I came here to prove to-day that I do confide in you, and firmly believe you to be a gentleman, and sincere; see,’ she said, drawing a card from her pocket and handing it to him, ‘I have written my address there, that will show you entirely

I trust you. It isn't very well written.
Let me read it for you,—

“MISS ZELL TORR,
At MRS WALKER'S,
Wilton Place,
Regent's Park.”

‘Thank you,’ said Florian, as he carefully put away the card in his pocket-book. ‘I will never betray your confidence by either writing or coming near you, till I have your full permission to do so. At the same time, remember that if you want me in any way, my greatest happiness will be to serve you.’

‘Ah!’ said Zell, ‘you will forget me.’

‘*Never!*’ he replied, with emphasis, which quickened the beating of the girl's heart.

‘I have been thinking much,’ she said, after a long silence, ‘of that poor girl of whom you spoke, who wished to come out as a singer, and who, when she went to a master in Germany for his opinion of her voice, was told by him that she had no chance, and yet, in spite of this, persevered, and by degrees became famous and rich enough to support her poor family.’

‘What a faithful little sweetheart it is,’ returned Florian sadly, ‘always thinking of the old love.’

‘I have thought more than ever lately, for there are times when I feel I’d give the world to be independent.’

‘You are very young to talk in that way. However, if you wish to go on

with the cultivation of your voice—should you at any time be able to come to Paris, I will try and get you into the Conservatoire of Music there.'

'You are very good,' said Zell. 'I see no chance of getting to Paris now; still the hope that I might reach it one day, will urge me on with my study of music.'

'And if you do come, write to me at once. To that address,' returned Florian, handing her his card. 'I am away from Paris a good deal, but letters directed there will always find me.'

'Yes, you shall hear from me,' she answered; 'and now good-bye. It has made me so happy to feel that I can trust you always,' she added, giving him her hand.

‘You can make *me* happy at any time, if you will only give me something to do for you,’ he said, as he warmly pressed the little hand which lay within his own, and not daring to linger lest the tide of passion he held in check should burst forth, he turned from her, and let her go on her way.

When he reached the hotel at which he was staying, he sat down in his room with a strange numb sense of weariness and pain ; he seemed to have grown older in his own estimation even since the morning, forasmuch as he had lost sight of that sweet face which had, in watching it, lent him a peep into that heaven which might have been his years ago, had he possessed then the nerve

to rouse himself from the lethargic misery which his unhappy position entailed, and which, he believed, was now lost to him for ever. For this man possessed the poet's soul, which lives but in the rosy dreams of youth, and so he fancied 'Time,' which had passed on so fleetly, only leaving here and there a trace on his manly comeliness, now stood for the first time before him like some fell destroyer, barring his way to happiness.

'A young dependent girl like this, unhappy in her home, my wealth and position might tempt her,' he meditated. 'No,' he said to himself as he flung the thought from him, 'I should loathe to buy the love I could not win.' And so he rose and busied himself getting ready for his de-

parture, believing that the joy which had lived for the past few weeks was dead.

Six months after his return to Paris found him domiciled in a pretty retreat close to the Champs Elysees ; here, for the past five months, he had devoted himself exclusively to his art, and the result of his labour proved to be an exquisite painting, which he entitled 'A Wood Nymph,' and in which the brush had, obedient to the soul's will, produced the face of Zell Torr, involuntarily. The picture was painted for a forthcoming exhibition. For Florian had fame and notoriety now, as well as wealth and position. The date was close at hand on which he had promised it should be sent—and so day after day he lingered

over it, adding a touch here and there, loath, in fact, to part with this conception of a past dream.

He was occupied thus one afternoon when a commissionnaire stopped at his door, and a little note was handed to him, which had been sent on from the Rue Castiglione, an address to which he was in the habit of having his letters addressed.

The handwriting was unknown, and he opened it carelessly, suspecting it to be an effusion from some fair dame who, for notoriety's sake, perchance, wished the celebrated painter to take her portrait; he had received and refused many such petitions of late. But as he read his breath came hard and quick, and a great

forbidden joy leaped into his soul at the simple words :—

‘ DEAR SIR,—I have determined to devote myself to the study of a public singer, and have come to Paris for that purpose, as you were kind enough to say you would endeavour to introduce me as a pupil to the School of Music. I have only just arrived from Calais, and am rather afraid, as I have never been abroad before. So, dear sir, if you would please tell the bearer of some place where I could stay and be safe I should be so thankful. If you are away from Paris I must do the best I can. Only I feel a little nervous, as I don’t know French,

and am bewildered among strange faces.

—I remain, yours faithfully,

‘ZELL TORR.’

‘P.S.—I will wait at the station till I see if I get an answer from you, before taking any steps about getting accommodation.’

Florian only stayed to don his overcoat and hat, while he sent the commissionnaire for a fiacre, and having ordered him to get on the box on its arrival, entered it himself, telling the driver to go with all speed to the Chemin de Fer.





CHAPTER VI.

HER LIVING GRAVE.

TARA did not die, however; nevertheless she awoke out of that long swoon, as bereft of sense as her inhuman jailor could desire. Brain fever soon set in with alarming rapidity, and then it did indeed require keepers to hold her down by main force, and to quiet her frantic cries; to have that torturing garment of restraint removed, ay, for days after it had been taken off. Weeks and months passed

thus in strong delirium, till at last the violence of the disease having spent itself, she lay on her bed, in the dismal room allotted to her, weak and helpless as a newborn babe, thin, ghastly looking, and with all the wealth of her glorious golden hair shorn from her head, praying, as the dawn of reason gave her back memory, to die, since hope was dead. The locket, she knew, would never be restored to her, therefore she had now nothing of value left to bribe those about her; reflection only brought her the bitter conviction that she had, by this vain attempt at escape, only closed the door more surely on 'Her Living Grave.'

Utter despair so retarded her recovery,

therefore, that Dr Seymour, at length becoming alarmed, had his patient removed to a somewhat more comfortable room, built in a kind of detached structure apart from the house, and with a window overlooking the garden, where, when she was strong enough, he compelled her daily to take a large amount of exercise. He also provided a new nurse, much more experienced and vigilant than the ill-fated Mrs Stubbs had been ; another gardener, likewise, supplied the place of Jim, of whom nothing had been heard.

With every loophole of escape thus closed, poor Tara knew she must bow to the iron hand of fate ; and yet, as the years went by, her bright, brave young

spirit yearned for flight, as the captive bird that the gilded cage has trapped. A gleam of gladness would at times visit her as she watched the roseate streaks of dawn through her prison bars, only to fade to deeper despondency ere the sun sank to rest.

And so in these vain longings through the dreary days of her living death, the magnificent beauty, which might have made her an empress, after a fashion blossomed, ripened, and then slowly faded, leaving her a sad-looking, thoughtful woman, handsome still, but with all the brilliancy and fire of youth spent, and a look of heart-broken resignation on the pale face, upon which, neither in love nor pity, had eyes rested for long years.

.

During the greater part of this time the nurse who had succeeded in Mrs Stubbs' footsteps had remained. She proved to be a hard, severe, unimpulsive woman, possessed of great determination and a heart of stone, which no amount of human suffering could touch, and which enabled her to preserve a system of reserve and unflinching firmness towards those under her charge, a course which generally ended in subjugating the strongest will to her control.

To Dr Seymour the service of Mrs Graham (as this woman was called) proved invaluable. Therefore his feelings may be imagined, when suddenly one morning she presented herself before

him in his consulting-room with these words,—

‘If you please, sir, I would like to give up my situation.’

‘You’d like to do what?’ roared the doctor, pausing in his writing, with quill uplifted.

‘Go, if you please, sir, this day month if it’s convenient.’

‘No, I’m d—d if it is! Come now, what’s the matter? Do you find your patient troublesome? I’ll soon bring her to reason if you do, the saucy jade!’

‘No, sir.’

‘Don’t you get enough to eat and drink, then?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Do you want more wages, then? Come, speak.’

‘No, sir.’

‘No, sir—yes, sir—no, sir—yes, sir,’ he mimicked in a fury. ‘Confound you!—what is it you *do* want?’

‘If you please, sir, to get married—’

‘*Married!*’ ejaculated the medico, wheeling round in his chair with open mouth and eyes in a paroxysm of surprise and disgust. ‘That’s all humbug! You’ve no business to think of such a thing.’

‘Yes, I have, sir. When a man asks me to be his wife, and loves me.’

‘*Love!*’ sneered the doctor. ‘What an infernal fool you are to talk of love at your time of life. How old are you?’

‘Thirty, sir.’

‘Bosh! any man with half an eye could see you’re forty; and at that age to come here blushing and simpering like a girl in her teens and talking of love. It’s disgusting! *positively* idiotic! Look at me; I never was in love in my life—*never!*’

‘Yet you married, sir,’ persisted Mrs Graham.

‘Married! yes, I *married*, but that’s another thing—merely a compact of social convenience; even so, do you suppose if my wife were dead I should take another? Catch me. Now you are free, why the devil should you nail yourself down again? Any sensible woman would be satisfied with one husband. Now, go away and attend to your duties,

and don't tease me with any more of your folly.'

'But, if you please, sir, I must ask you to look out for some one to take my place. I shall leave this day month,' said Mrs Graham in her quiet, firm way.

And the doctor knew with whom he had to deal. Besides, his rage had by this time cooled somewhat.

'Well,' he said, 'if you are *determined* to make a fool of yourself, advice is worse than useless. So now tell who the man is.'

'A gardener, sir—Robert Noel—a very good, steady man—a widower with one child about five. I'd have taken him a year back but for that. I ain't fond of children at any time. However, I

know he's fond of me, and a hard-working, likely fellow into the bargain. So I have made up my mind at last.'

'Of course you have. Women are born with a faculty for fabricating their own misery. A fine time you'll have of it—with the care of another's brat—and—' But a knock at the door now came to interrupt this flow of eloquence. 'Come here to-morrow about this time and I'll see what can be done,' he said, turning on his heel and quitting his study with one of the keepers, who had come to say he was wanted.

.
'Well, have you thought better of it and changed your mind?' was his query,

as Mrs Graham appeared before him at the time appointed.

‘No, sir.’

‘And you are still bent on committing mental and moral *felo de se*, by running your neck into the matrimonial halter?’

‘I don’t know what that is, sir; but I mean to have my young man!’

‘The deuce! you do? It’s wonderful how brazen women have become now-a-days. Well, then, now listen to me—this lover of yours is respectable and trustworthy, you tell me?’

‘He is, indeed; and clever—though I say it, sir.’

‘Then I have a proposal to make to you—Mathews down at the lodge-gate there is, as you know, too fond

of a drop, and so I have given him notice. Now, if you think well of it, and your husband is willing after your marriage, I'll put him in to Mathews' place, and you can then continue to take charge of your patient, and receive the same wages.'

'I'm sure, sir, I'm most grateful. I'll see Robert this evening, and talk it over with him.'

.

A month later saw the newly-married couple in possession of the lodge. Mrs Noel having agreed to take charge of Tara through the day, with the understanding that another attendant should remain with her at night.

.

One day Mrs Noel, having a message to deliver to her spouse, took Tara with her as far as the lodge. At the door stood a fair little curly-headed blue-eyed child, with a very dirty pinafore, and small hands very sticky, from holding the lollypops which filled them. As Mrs Noel's eyes lighted on the child, it was perceptible that she bore her no great share of affection.

'Come here, Phylis,' she said harshly.
'Where's dad-da?'

'In the garden.'

'Who gave you those sweets?'

'Dad-da.'

'Did he?' returned the woman—her eyes flashing with a sudden, jealous anger. 'He was very naughty then

to waste his money on such trash ; and look at the mess your clean pinafore's in, you dirty child ! Give them to me directly !'

'I sha'n't,' said the child ; 'they're mine ; dad-da gived them to me ; go away,' and she pouted her lips and twisted her little body defiantly.

An ugly scowl swept over Mrs Noel's face as she snatched away the sweet-meats, and shook the child roughly by the arm, and then raising her, administered a sound slapping promptly on the spot.

'There,' she said, as she set her down, 'that'll teach you better than to say sha'n't to me ; and if you don't leave off crying, I'll whip you harder still.'

‘Don’t be cross with her any more,’ pleaded Tara, as she took the sobbing child in her arms; ‘she will be good now—I know she will.’

Mrs. Noel made no remark; but, calling her husband, left Tara with the child, while she went to speak to him.

And Tara, as she looked down on the tiny face resting on her bosom, felt a strange new sensation steal into her heart; her soul, as it were in its bareness, was knit to the child’s by some mysterious influence, sweet and tender, as she bowed her head to kiss the quivering little lips.

Mrs Noel and her husband now came up.

‘Put her down; she don’t deserve’ no

petting,' said the latter, addressing Tara. 'Why can't you keep your clothes clean. you naughty child? If you don't mind what your mother says, I must give you the cane,' he added, as Phylis, once set free, clung to him, and hid her curly head in the folds of his coat.

'Come, it's time we were back,' said Mrs Noel abruptly, and with a farewell nod to her husband, she hurried Tara away.

Tara's heart was full of the tiny sorrowful mite she had quitted thus. After proceeding some distance she turned round to look for her, and saw her standing by her father, looking up fondly in his face, while kneeling with one arm thrown round her, he placed some bright blossoms he had gathered in her tiny hand.

Mrs Noel's eyes also turned in the same direction, and a cruelly vindictive expression came upon her face, which told Tara, better than words, of the bitter lot which lay before the child, who rivalled this woman in the affections of the man she loved.

.

All through the night Tara lay thinking of this little one's fate. And on the morrow, for the first time for long years past, she forgot her own misery. Even the bare rooms which shut her out from the liberty of life, she beheld with more resignation, and when, in the afternoon, she was marshalled out with the other patients in the dreary enclosure for exercise, she did not see their wild

eyes set in haggard faces, nor the idiotic grins or grimaces on their lips, but only the image of that little child, who had all unconsciously touched the chord of love in her withered heart.





CHAPTER VII.

THE ASP AMONG THE ROSES.

WHAT a fearful crush! The English, I notice, are most conspicuous in actually fighting their way in, and putting French politeness to the blush.'

'But you are English, are you not, monsieur?' asked the Frenchman thus addressed, as he turned with a laugh to his neighbour, who had just managed to wedge in and take the place beside him.

'Yes, I am unmistakably English,' was

the reply. 'I only arrived in Paris last night. One must kill time in one way or another, so I came here. But had I known of the semi-strangulation in store for me, I should certainly have stayed away.'

'Pardon, monsieur ;' retorted his enthusiastic companion vehemently ; 'but if you had not come, you would have missed one great *plaisir*, for you would not have seen the most lovely creature in the world, with de voice *délicieuse, charmante, ravissante*. She take all Paris captive. Monsieur, we are her slaves, so all Paris is come here to bid her adieu. Alas ! we vill not have another prima donna like her again, *ne-var de tout*.'

'What is her name ?'

‘Monsieur, she is called Mademoiselle Lise Veronique, but one has told me she is English. *Par Dieu!* you have reason to be proud, *elle est belle comme un ange.*’

‘Mademoiselle Veronique?’ repeated his hearer. ‘Ah, yes, she has been highly commended in the papers.’

‘Bah! vot pa-paar can do la justice. Monsieur, I do know de truth—it is dis. De manager of de opera in London, vell he of-far her de salary magnifique to go to England and sing for him, but she has refused, and after to-night she is gone; she leave de stage for *ev-ar.*’

‘Is she old, then?’

‘*Ma foi! non!* she has not yet twenty-two years, *dans la fleur de la jeunesse.*’

‘Then why does she retire?’

‘Ah! monsieur, *viola un secret*. We lose her because she has lost her heart—*comprenez vous?*’

‘Not exactly; women do that on the stage, and remain—’

‘*Certainement!* but mademoiselle goes to von great artist of high birth, and *beaucoup des richesses*. He has much pride; he vill not let his *wife* sing on the stage *de tout*.’

‘Selfish dog!’

‘Pardon, monsieur, I do not blame him. She is beautiful; he loves her, and has money—why should he let her sing for others?’

‘No—well, I suppose he is wise to cage his bird when he has caught it. Do you know his name?’

‘No, monsieur; at this moment I forget, but it is well known in Paris. I—hush!—now look, here she comes,’ and as the audience watched with bated breath, the Zerlina of a poet’s dream glided on the stage, and the great house was filled with a glorious volume of liquid melody, trilled forth as spontaneously as the thrush’s lay in the grove.

‘You *are* charmed; is it not so, monsieur?’ asked the Frenchman, appealing to his neighbour.

But the latter neither heard nor heeded, for, blind to all around him, his eyes were fixed on the singer’s face, with an eager, hungry look. It was not till the scene was over, and she had left

the stage, that he was able to recover some degree of equanimity.

‘I spoke to you before, monsieur,’ said the Frenchman, again addressing him, ‘and asked you how you liked her; but you were too much absorbed to notice. Ah! I can see you are like all the world—no eyes or ears for anything else when she is present.’

‘Excuse me, I certainly did not hear you; she is indeed lovely, and her voice has a strange charm for me,’ was the reply, and the speaker roused himself as though casting off the trammels of a dream.

.

It is all over, the glare, the crush, and the sweet music. They have closed

the doors of the opera-house more than an hour, and the farewell of Mademoiselle Véronique has sunk into the vast sea of past events. Yes, the whirl of that brief life of excitement with its plaudits and its bay-leaf crown of victory is gone as a tale that is told, and the young prima donna sits alone in her pretty apartment overlooking the Bois de Boulogne. On the table before her, piled up like a huge pyramid, lie the roses and sweet blossoms which have been flung indiscriminately in a shower at her feet.

She still wears Zerlina's robes, and the heavy plaits of silken hair fall far below her tiny waist ; her eyes are humid, and a great joy shines in them ; suddenly the door is flung open, and with an exquisite

happiness thrilling through every vein and nerve, and deepening the rose tint on her cheek and lips, she rises to meet the tall, handsome man who has entered.

‘My darling! Florian!’ she has only time to utter the name ere she is locked closely to his heart.

‘My own!’ he murmurs, as his lips meet hers, again and again, to drain the intoxicating rapture of the love which bound these souls together as one. ‘My *very* own!’ then holding her still to his breast, he gazes with passionate longing into the azure depths of those eyes where he sees his own image reflected, as he whispers, ‘My God! what I have suffered while you had to lend your beauty to the public gaze. My love!’

my love! forgive me, for I am selfish in being so jealous of the pearl I have dared to claim. Sweetheart, tell me, will you be content to lose the homage of the world, and for me—so little worthy of such a sacrifice?’

‘Florian,’ cried the girl, as she laid her head upon his shoulder, and looked up at him with all her loving soul in her eyes, ‘how can you mock me? From the very first, you know, you have been dear to me, and I have gone on caring for you more and more till I worship you almost as a God—and have I not a right? For, my brave Florian! my king! all that is good and true and beautiful you have brought into my life. But for you I would have been

a worthless being. Dearest, *you* make the sacrifice ; not I. Oh, I pray you may never repent of it. Have you thought enough about the position of the woman you have chosen to be your wife? You are handsome — (yes, dear, don't stop me ; I will praise you this once),—rich, and famous. Whereas *I* am only a poor girl reared on charity ; and at best even now but the servant of the public. I am 'so sorry, Florian, that I am what I am. I should like to have been of high lineage for your dear sake, because, dear, I know you are proud, and there are times when I fear you will repent having made a girl of such lowly origin yours ; darling, if you think it will ever be so, let me go away, even now.'

‘As if I *could*, my fairest,’ he whispered, as his arms tightened about her. ‘Do you think the one love in a man’s life is so brittle a thing as to be easily broken? Kiss me, dear — one loving, sweet kiss. Now darling, *dare* you even harbour the thought of leaving me?’

‘I could not part from you *and live*,’ answered the girl in low tones as she twined her arms about his neck and laid her head upon his breast; but still I try to think of what is best for you; because I love you better than myself.’

‘My best and dearest,’ he said, seating himself on the ottoman and drawing her down beside him; ‘listen. When I was a young man, pride of birth was my besetting sin, but years have made

me wiser. I have only pride left in one thing—and that is *honour*. The woman who is modest, pure and true, is a gentlewoman at heart, whatever her rank may be, and fit wife for the man who loves her, let his social station be what it may. But I'll tell you what, I would never make a woman my wife who had blot or stain on her character. If a woman deceived me, and I found her out worthless, I believe I would curse her—and die. My darling, are you ill?' he asked as the girl uttered a low cry and hid her face.

'No, Florian, no, dear; only it frightens me to hear you talk so. Go on.'

'Well, then, before I told you of my love, I watched you pass through the fiery

ordeal of public life, and I know that the spotless lily is not more unsullied than your purity. I know also the costly gifts and beguiling offers your great beauty evoked from men of lofty position; and from all this false admiration I have seen you turn with loathing and disgust. Many girls are good, dearest, but they have little temptation to be otherwise; but you, a mere child, with your dazzling fairness, have passed through the furnace unscathed. No tongue has dared to utter a word of scandal in connection with your name; unapproachable, cold and haughty, is all they have been able to say of my darling, and I have listened and felt so proud of my gem in all her priceless worth as to be almost dizzy with happiness.'

‘Florian,’ said the girl, ‘it was all because I had no world but you ; otherwise I am not good enough to be your wife.’

‘Not good enough, my darling ; how can you say so ? See, I kneel at your feet, and woo you as an empress,—for are you not the queen of my soul ? Sweet-heart, are you not dreaming, and when you wake to find yourself my wife, will you not miss the excitement of the theatre and the praise of the multitude ?’ he said. He laid his head upon her lap, as if he feared to read some confirmation of his doubt upon her face.

But she rose abruptly, and putting him from her, burst into a passion of tears, and seating herself by the table, leant upon it and buried her face in her hands.

‘My darling!’ cried Florian, as he bent over her in alarm, ‘for God’s sake, tell me how I have vexed you.’

‘You break my heart when you question my love; and—and—you have tried me to-night more than I can bear,’ she faltered.

‘I have been a *brute*!’ returned her lover promptly, as he took her in his arms and kissed away the traces of her tears. ‘Will you forgive me?’

‘As if *I* had anything to forgive,’ she answered, with a faint smile. ‘I am foolish at times. Come, dear, don’t let us talk of forgiving; it sounds as though we had been quarrelling, and I never mean that we should do that.’

‘God forbid! Look at Zerlina’s roses,

why, she might make a couch of them, they are so plentiful.'

'Yes; and are they not lovely, Florian? Come, let us look at them, I have had no time as yet. There they lie, just as they were brought from the theatre.'

Florian, as he obeyed, and examined these bouquets of every hue and form, found dainty notes deftly concealed among the petals of some, while to the stem of one, with card attached, was tied a costly diamond ring, and to another a sapphire cross.

'What will you do with these, dear?' he asked, handing them to the girl, who stood beside him, with her hand resting on his shoulder.

'Try and make good come out of evil,' she answered gaily. 'I think I shall sell

them, and give the proceeds to the poor, having the fact made public through the papers. This would help to cool the ardour of the men who sent them, wouldn't it?'

'I should think so, indeed. Well, and about these notes, darling?' he asked, gathering the flimsy missives together, 'will you read them?'

'No, Florian; burn them. And these as well,' she added, as she opened and took from her *secrétaire* a packet of letters. 'If you will read one, Florian,' she said, as she gave them into his hand, 'it will give you an idea of the contents of the rest.'

Florian opened the first, and read,—

‘ADORABLE SONGSTRESS,—Your divine beauty has led my senses captive. Only grant me the favour of your smiles, and my wealth, title, and time are yours to command. Will you buy some little trifle with the enclosed, to remind you of the admiration of your devoted, W. S.

‘P.S.—My carriage shall wait, and be at your service to drive you home this evening, should you do me the honour of making use of it.’

Florian’s eyes flashed with anger as he stooped to pick up the bank-note, which had fallen while he read from between the sheets of note-paper emblazoned with coronet and crest.

‘The villain!’ he cried, ‘to dare to send

you this—a trap for virtue. A little later, it would have cost him dear. It is men of his stamp who lower the stage and make it what it is—a very quicksand to the inexperienced.'

'There, you shall not look at any more. They are all after the same style, and will only pain you. Let me cast them to the flames,' she added, taking them from him, and flinging them into the fire.

'My dear one, I thank you,' he whispered, as he gathered her to his breast; 'for so ends this chapter in your life, and the torments which I have endured in knowing that my love was open to receive these marks of insulting admiration; although I knew they could not tarnish your

spotless reputation ; just as soon could the foul vapour rising from a corrupt and over-grown city dim the lustre of the stars above it. Innocence has been to you like a shield, darling, and thus I treasure all the more the sweet blossom I found by the wayside in all its guilelessness.'

The girl trembled in his strong arms as she listened, and bowed a crimson face upon his breast.

'No wonder evil thoughts, which these letters conjure up, bring the blush of shame to your cheek, my sweetest,' he murmured. 'Let us forget them henceforth. God helping me, I will protect you from *all* harm and pain, as far as it is in human power. Rather let us talk

over our own bright hopes and plans for the future. What do you say to America for our honeymoon trip? You see you saw so much of Italy last year while studying at Milan.'

'Florian, I leave it quite to you to decide on where we shall go; for with you beside me, all places will seem beautiful.'

'My own! how happy you make me. Well, then, look here; I have brought you a little plan I've sketched of a tour, and to-morrow morning I want you to study it, and then let me have your opinion—not to night, mind. No, dear, I must have your faithful promise that you will go off now straight to bed, for you look sadly pale and weary, my lily. By the way, I want you, dear, to let

me help you with settling your affairs and business; as your affianced husband, I have the right. May I?’

‘*May you?*—of course. Oh, Florian, it will be so good of you, for I am worried to death in many ways, and people come pestering me to give farewell concerts, and *won't* take “No!” for an answer.’

‘I can understand that, my darling, and feel I’m a selfish dog in robbing the world of so much beauty and talent.’

‘*You* are my world,’ cried the girl, with happy tears dimming her blue eyes.

‘And you,’ answered Florian, ‘are *life* to me. I never lived in the true sense of the word till I met you, my treasured one!’

‘Ah! dearest! and now to me it is so sweet to have nothing more to do with ambition, only to try, in my own poor way, to make you happy. You will come early in the morning, and see these people for me?’

‘I will; depend on me. And now one more long sweet kiss, and then my bird must go to rest.’

‘It seems so hard to part from you to-night, Florian,’ sobbed the girl as she released herself from his embrace. I never felt like this before. What is it? Is it an ominous foreboding that you are going to love me less?’

‘I can never do that, dear; and remember there will be very few more partings between us ere I hold you for

ever as my own. You have been overwrought, my poor child, and taxed your strength too severely. Come, sweetheart, do as I ask you ; go and lie down at once, and with a nice sleep all these unhappy fancies will vanish.'

She did not speak, only she stretched out her arms to wind them about his neck, as she laid her soft, young cheek to his, and then with one more passionate caress she sent him from her.

.

As Florian reached the street door, a man, closely muffled, stood there, begging permission to see Mademoiselle Veronique on business.

'You can't to-night ; it's impossible ; mademoiselle has retired,' said Florian

impatiently, for the sight of this individual roused the demon jealousy, and poisoned the sweetness of that last parting.

‘It is of the greatest importance that I should speak to mademoiselle,’ he persisted.

‘Mademoiselle Veronique has placed her affairs in my hands. If you have any matter to speak of, I can hear you, for she has commissioned me to act for her in all business arrangements for the future,’ returned Florian. ‘I shall be here by eleven—or you can call at my house at any time,’ he added, handing his card and address to the stranger.

‘Florian le Vismes!’ exclaimed the latter with a slight start as he read the

name. 'Sir, I have then the honour of addressing Mademoiselle Veronique's affianced husband?'

'Yes; and therefore what may concern her, concerns me equally. I am quite ready to give you my attention now, if necessary.'

'Thank you; no. I will come again,' said the stranger, somewhat abruptly, as he bowed and disappeared.

'Some fellow from the theatre,' thought Florian, as, thankful at having disposed of him, he made his way home.

.

END OF VOL. II.

